

NOTE OF A MEETING ON HEPATITIS C HANDLING ON WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 1997

Present: Secretary of State
PS(H)
Ms Phillips

There was a full and very helpful discussion of the major issues. What follows is a summary of the points arising:

Secretary of State's intention was that the framework for policy on Hepatitis C (HCV) should be to develop appropriate research and planned health promotion without causing unnecessary health scares or swamping NHS services.

On research, Ministers were made aware that the Departmental Research Committee was meeting on Friday and this topic would be raised. Secretary of State said his assessment of this paper was that there was a need to develop a properly coordinated R&D programme on HCV as it was obviously an emerging public health issue. He could not make a judgement of its relative priority but nevertheless it should be addressed.

On health promotion, Ministers would not want to see a separate identifiable HCV prevention campaign which would unnecessarily raise its profile and thus public concern. It should continue to be addressed through the safer sex and drug misuse programmes.

On clinical guidance, Secretary of State noted the plans to promulgate guidance produced by the RCP, following the meeting scheduled for June. He suggested that GPs should have a greater role in identifying, diagnosing, treating and referring HCV as appropriate, and that GP involvement should be secured before the June meeting. The most effective way to do this should be through a letter from CMO to the RCGP.

It was agreed that it would be very useful to have on record a statement of the Government's action on researching, preventing, diagnosing and treating HCV. If CMO was in agreement, a further CMO letter, this time to District Directors of Public Health, setting out all the elements of the policy should be sent out in the near future.

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