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JMC Minutes (79)4

NATIONAL BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE

JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (DHSS/NW THAMES RHA) FOR THE CENTRAL BLOOD LABORATORIES

Minutes of the 4th Meeting held on Wednesday 12 September in Room D101 Alexander Fleming House.

- PRESENT: Dr E L Harris (Chairman)
- Mr W P N Armour
  - Mr L A Bradshaw
  - Mr J Harley
  - Dr A M Holburn
  - Mr R P Kosin (in place of Mr Lee)
  - Dr R S Lane
  - Professor P L Mollison
  - Dr R M G Oliver
  - Dr D M Walford
  - Mr T E Dutton (Secretary)

- IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J G Brechin
- Mr G K Brennen

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence, but Dr Harris welcomed Mr Kosin who was attending on behalf of Mr Lee, Mr Bradshaw (NW Thames RHA), and Mr Brennen (DHSS). Dr Tovey had earlier intimated that he would probably be out of the country when the meeting was held.

MATTERS ARISING

- i a. Terms of Reference of the Joint Management Committee and it's title

These were agreed subject to the title of the Committee being changed to:  
 "Joint Management Committee (DHSS/NW Thames RHA) for the Central Blood Laboratories"

and the NW Thames Regional Health Authority having an opportunity at their next meeting of considering the amended terms of reference.

Mr Harley explained that if there were any particular matters in respect of which the Authority felt in need of the protection which a direction afforded, the Department was always very willing to consider the matter.

i b. Terms of Reference of the Scientific and Technical Committee

These were agreed subject to the substitution of "associated financial" for "economic" in line 2.

ii Progress in setting up machinery for maintaining the extended BPL estate

The Department explained that the purchase of the estate had now been completed and steps were being taken to merge the original BPL lease (which MRC would surrender) into the Elstree freehold.

The RHA was currently carrying out a survey of the buildings on the estate and a report would shortly be available. Arrangements were in hand within the Department to establish the microbiological safety of the unoccupied buildings and if necessary to deal with any dangerous conditions which might be revealed.

The RHA were preparing a programme to manage the grounds, following a recommendation by the Department's works officers that the Authority should try to "borrow" a grounds maintenance officer, if there was not already one in the Region. Mr Armour confirmed that a start had been made with this task. The Chairman referred to the need to ensure that the estate was adequately fenced, both for general security reasons and to avoid any accidents to children who might wander on to the estate.

Negotiations between the Department and the Lister Institute to put on a formal footing the arrangement whereby the Department formerly occupied Lister property and the Institute temporarily occupied property now part of BPL, ~~were~~ nearing completion.

Dr Lane confirmed that money was available to remedy the defects known to exist in the sewage plant and estimates to put it right would be obtained. Dr Lane undertook to proceed in conjunction with the appropriate Works Officers.

The Committee discussed the security arrangements at BPL which Dr Lane stated were quite inadequate. It was agreed that if the money was available in the allocations for this year, he should be free to appoint both security and maintenance staff. After Mr Brennen had explained the practice adopted when "letting" NHS houses, it was agreed that the vacant cottages at BPL should first be offered at NHS rentals to BPL staff, or prospective staff, to occupy as long as they remained employed at the laboratories. It was agreed that if security and maintenance personnel could not be attracted on this basis, the Committee would have to reconsider the position although it was anticipated that there would be numerous obstacles to the extension of the tied cottage system whereby accommodation was provided at a low rent or rent free.

The Chairman referred to the need to remember that all aspects of the management of the Central Blood Laboratories were likely, sooner or later, to come under the scrutiny of the Exchequer and Audit Department.

iii Progress with the acquisition of the Harkness Building

The Department outlined the connection which existed between the enquiry into the future of the Cowley Road Hospital, Oxford and the likely availability of the Harkness Building. Although there were grounds for believing that the Harkness Building would eventually be available to rehouse BGRL, the other possibility had to be faced and the Department's Regional Liaison Officers for the 4 Thames Regions had been asked to make discreet enquiries about properties available in the London area which might be suitable.

Dr Holburn pointed out that the cost of relocation was likely to increase by about 20% each year and he was concerned that the money might not be available if the move was further delayed. Mr Brechin explained that "slippage" in building projects, when there was good reason, was usually regarded as a priority item in the subsequent year, but with all the competing claims on resources, he could not give any undertaking about the future.

It was agreed that 2 possibilities in London, (i) relocation in property owned by the Trustees of St Bartholomew's Hospital or

(ii) at the London Hospital were worth considering.

iv The arrangements for managing BPL and BGRL building projects

Mr Harley described the circumstances which led to the setting up with the Chairman's agreement of the ad hoc Building Sub-Committee and the steps which were being taken to ensure that any contracts which BPL may have entered into are put on a formal footing. Dr Lane expressed his satisfaction with the way the ad hoc Committee was working.

v The replacement of plant, the breakdown of which could not have been foreseen

Mr Brechin explained that there were no contingency reserves within the Department, but they would clearly have to take a realistic view of the situation if such a breakdown occurred, so far as wider financial considerations allowed.

vi Dr Lane's job description and salary

A job description had been prepared which Dr Lane was currently considering. Mr Armour said that the Authority would prefer to deal with the matter in the normal way referring to the Committee only if a matter of principle arose. The Committee agreed.

The Department confirmed that a job description was being prepared for Dr Holburn on which he would shortly be invited to comment.

4. The Report of the Medicines Inspectors on the Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree

The Chairman stressed the highly confidential nature of the Report. The Committee agreed that the Scientific and Technical Committee should be invited to consider the implications of the Report and the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Inspection Action Group, but it would be for the Joint Management Committee to respond on the major issues.

HP/B23/RHOS/13

The Chairman emphasised the importance of going back to fundamentals and considering whether it was entirely appropriate to regard blood products in the same way as pharmaceutical products, even though it was known that pharmaceutical standards had been applied to commercial plasma fractionators. There was no evidence that BPL products had harmed anyone to whom they were administered, although Dr Lane reported that he had received back from hospitals BPL products which, if they had been administered, would certainly have led to the death of the patient, but it was always possible that the product had been contaminated after leaving BPL.

The Committee considered the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Inspection Action Group. There was some discussion about the reference to lack of an integrated manufacturing operation at BPL, but Dr Lane thought that the observation was justified if one considered the requirements of a properly integrated manufacturing operation. Dr Lane drew attention to the way in which finished products were mixed with in-process goods in the final stages at BPL and to the high rejection rate of finished products which was a wasteful and costly feature of the Laboratory. Dr Lane questioned the advisability of shelving the "stopgap" programme, but Mr Harley explained that the programme had not been shelved, just merely held up until a decision could be taken about where the greatest need for money lay. Mr Harley emphasised that the immediate requirement was to draw up a list of priorities for upgrading the facilities at BPL which could be priced. Dr Lane thought that the need was not so much for a list of individual features which needed to be remedied, but a totally integrated package for improving the state of affairs which would include some means of ensuring that BPL received plasma of the requisite quality. He maintained that there was no question of deciding whether or not to use money on "stopgap" or on improving product safety since "stopgap" would itself represent a major move to increased product safety. If <sup>911</sup>the Medicines Inspectors' immediate requirements were to be met it would cost far more than "stopgap". He went on to outline the various ways in which efforts were being made to bring standards closer to the stated requirements, but emphasised that these were strictly limited with his present budget. He also explained that he was hoping, with the agreement of the main users, to cut down drastically on the production of freeze dried plasma which the Report criticised particularly strongly. He wholly accepted the criticism of the quality control facilities, improvement of which he had always recognised to be one of the first priorities.



The Chairman said that it was useful to get one or two aspects of the matter clear even at this early stage of consideration of the Report. Dr Lane had estimated the commercial value of the products made by BPL to be something approaching £10 million per annum and Dr Harris saw no prospect of Ministers being prepared to accept the loss of this productive capacity. Mr Harley pointed out that if present cash limits were retained this alone would almost inevitably lead to some loss or production at BPL. The Chairman doubted whether it was realistic to say that no aspects of BPL production should be increased although he accepted that the recommendation was theoretically sound. It was very doubtful whether a new factory could be operating in much under 5 years which left little choice but to undertake substantial upgrading of the present Laboratory. It was the responsibility of the Joint Management Committee to inform Ministers of the options open to them for manufacturing blood products and this was the immediate task before the Committee.

5. The outcome of the meeting of 31 August with staff interests

Mr Armour reported that the meeting had progressed in a cooperative and friendly manner and had proved most useful. The staff now appeared to accept that it was in their own interests to tidy up their Terms and Conditions. He would circulate copies of the minutes of the meeting to members of the Joint Management Committee and it would help the staff if he could say that they had been favourably received. It was recorded in the minutes that the staff were afraid of the possibility that the laboratory might be closed, particularly in view of what had happened to the Lister Institute laboratories, and there was a need to give the staff a firm assurance about their future. The Chairman accepted that a statement was needed if apprehension was not to grow to an extent which would impair the existing working of the laboratory. He invited Mr Armour to tell the staff interests that the Joint Management Committee were firm in the view (and would recommend to Ministers) that the Blood Products Laboratory was needed, in both the short and the long term. The Committee was not in a position at the present time to know what the eventual arrangement for the management of the laboratories might be; this might depend on the Government's reactions to the Royal Commission's Report and on proposals for restructuring the National Health Service. There was no doubt however that the position of bodies such as the NBIS whose activities extended across the NHS would have to be looked at in a special way. The Joint Management Committee was also sure that the Government would not be

prepared to see the voluntary unpaid donor system, which was the envy of many countries, impaired in any way.

Mr Armour referred to the staff interests' wish to receive copies of papers of general interest in addition to the Joint Management Committee minutes. After discussion, it was agreed that copies of the minutes of the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Finance Sub-Committee could be made available to them together with copies of papers which the RHA and Department thought that it would be of mutual benefit for both management and staff to have studied.

6. Suggested scheme for approving overseas travel for senior staff (JMCCL(79)15)

The scheme was agreed.

7. Any other business

The Secretary explained that the Department's Legal Branch had been asked for their opinion on the position of the Regional Health Authority and that of Dr Lane as the "person responsible" under the Medicines Act in the event of a BPL product causing injury to a patient. Their reply was awaited.

Dr Lane outlined the situation which had led to GRO-A requesting premature retirement on medical grounds and the steps which he had taken subsequently in conjunction with the Regional Health Authority. This action had been agreed with Dr Harris who emphasised the necessity for ensuring that all the required procedures were observed because it often happened that staff who sought premature retirement subsequently come to regret their action.

Dr Lane also described the arrangements which he was making for seconding Dr Smith to BPL from PFL, Oxford for part of his time, action which had also been agreed with the Chairman.

8. Date of the next meeting

19th December 1979 2.15 pm.