

Members' Questions

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, what criteria he uses in declining to answer questions on the grounds of disproportionate effort which would be involved.

Mr. Heseltine: [pursuant to his reply, 27 November 1984, c. 412]: It has been the practice of all Governments that answers to parliamentary questions need to be prepared with the same regard to economy as applies to other aspects of Government business. It has been a long-standing convention that a Minister may decline to give a substantive reply to a question if he considers that the cost of providing that reply, mainly in terms of the cost of staff time involved, would be disproportionate to its value to Parliament and the public.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the normal interval between the removal of a signals log from a vessel returning from patrol and its destruction; and where that log is kept in that interval.

Mr. Stanley [pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1984, c. 335]: Signal logs will normally remain on the vessel concerned. If removed during a maintenance or refitting period, the ship's company would be responsible for their safekeeping.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Blood Products

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement regarding progress on the upgrading of the blood products laboratory at Elstree; whether he is satisfied that the amount of money allocated for this programme will enable it to be carried out effectively on schedule; and when he expects the United Kingdom will be self-sufficient in blood products.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The building of the new production unit at Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree is progressing satisfactorily, and is presently due to be completed by the original target date of January 1986.

This new production unit, when completed, will have the capacity to meet the estimated needs of the National Health Service in England and Wales for all blood products. Scotland and Northern Ireland are virtually self-sufficient already.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to increase British production of factor 8 and 9 blood products and reduce dependence on United States imports.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government decided in 1982 that self-sufficiency in all blood products, including Factors 8 and 9, should be achieved, and that the Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree should be rebuilt to provide the capacity to manufacture the blood product needs of the National Health Service in England and Wales. Work commenced in May 1983 and the project is presently on time for completion in January 1986.

Housing Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why information on the take-up of housing benefit supplement is not available.

Mr. Whitney: Information on the take-up of benefits is normally derived from analysis of family expenditure survey data. Housing benefit supplement was introduced in April 1983 and the 1983 family expenditure survey is not yet available.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number, and proportion, of health authorities which operate a call and recall system for cervical cytology; and whether he has received any representations advocating the national implementation of such a system.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not keep information centrally on call and recall systems. We have asked health authorities to recall at five-yearly intervals women over the age of 35 who have at some time presented themselves for a smear test and women who have had three or more pregnancies. We have had some representations suggesting that local systems which call women for a smear test might be more effective. Health authorities may introduce such a system if they decide that it is a local priority and they have the necessary resources. Our Department is currently funding research into the effectiveness of a local call system.

Dogs (Infection)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what assessment he makes of the spread of disease and infection via the dog population of the United Kingdom; and how many cases of disease and infection in humans each year are caused by dogs;

(2) if he will initiate a publicity campaign to foster public understanding of the way in which dogs can spread infection, in particular in relation to the need to observe strict hygiene in contact with dogs.

Mr. John Patten: Figures are not available centrally on the incidence of disease associated with dogs, but there is no evidence to suggest that, if correctly managed and cared for, they constitute a significant risk to human health. Veterinarians advise dog owners on the care and management of dogs, and the Health Education Council and several voluntary and other organisations have produced literature on responsible pet ownership and the necessary hygiene precautions. We do not, therefore, consider a publicity campaign necessary.

NHS Property (Security)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the measures taken since 1979 to improve security of National Health Service property as shown in the letter of 14 November from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to the hon. Member for North Norfolk.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. My letter of 14 November was as follows
Ralph Howell Esq. MP