

Mr Winstanley
HS1A

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AIDS LEAFLET

I attach a revised draft of the typescript you brought over on Friday. Mindful of the urgency and possible problems in agreeing changes with the author(s) we have stuck as closely as possible to the original structure and text. The aim has been simply to improve clarity and understanding.

Possibly the most significant changes concern:

- (a) The title. We felt the original "AIDS An Explanation" was a little bland. In the light of recent media publicity many people may feel little need for an explanation. "AIDS and how it concerns blood donors" has a more direct appeal to donors.
- (b) Imports from the USA. It is probable that the recent publicity has increased misunderstanding about commercial blood donation in the USA, and about the consequent health risks in general. We have included a new paragraph at the top of the third page to correct these misapprehensions.

If you think any of the changes are likely to cause problems, please let Victoria Brown or myself know.

Turning to publication dates, I have discussed the matter with John Bolitho and we believe that incoming Ministers will certainly wish to see and approve the draft before printing. It seems unlikely that we could obtain such permission before the week commencing 20 June. Printing and distribution to RTCs would take perhaps 3 weeks. We can minimise delay by asking COI to proceed immediately with a layout, if you are content with the revised text.

I don't think we can improve much on this timetable. It would be dangerous to go ahead without Ministerial approval on so sensitive a subject. Nominally, this may be an NBTS leaflet, but the Department's overall responsibility would be clear to potential critics and, in any event, we are legally obliged to include DHSS, as publisher, in the imprint.

GRO-C

R Windsor

ID

D517 AFH/ext GRO-C

7 June 1983

cc: Mrs Hewlett-Davies
Mr Bolitho
Miss Brown

AIDS

and how it concerns blood donors

What is AIDS?

AIDS is short for Acquired Immune Deficiency Sndrome (AIDS). It is a condition in which a person's resistance to infection and disease is weakened or even destroyed.

Every day of our lives we come into contact with germs and viruses capable of causing disease, and normally we do not become ill because the body has a complicated and efficient system to protect it against infection. This protective system is called the immune system.

It has long been known that very rare cases (usually hereditary) of impaired resistance to infection occur. Over the past two years American medical journals have reported a sharp increase in the number of patients with little or no resistance to infection. It soon became obvious that a new disease or condition was responsible for this increase, and that the cause was something that affected the patient's immune system. This disease is known as acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It means that people with AIDS can get unusual and serious illnesses that are difficult to treat. We do not know why their immune system fails: a virus infection may possibly be responsible.

It was very quickly realised that the majority of patients with AIDS were homosexual males living in cities with a large homosexual population, e.g. San Francisco, New York. Other patients included drug addicts and immigrants from the island of Haiti.

Because AIDS is a new and serious illness, it has received considerable publicity on TV, Radio and in the Press [newspapers] and many people may have been caused unjustified worry. But in reality AIDS is a rare disease. In America, with a population of around 220 million, the number of reported cases of AIDS to date is around 1,000.

Is this true? Unlike a cold or 'flu, AIDS cannot be 'caught' without physical contact with an affected person, and it is thought that sexual intercourse is necessary for its transmission.

Who is at risk from AIDS?

At present AIDS is very rare in Britain - whether this will change is not known. Most of our knowledge about AIDS comes from America where the experience is that those most at risk are:-

- practising homosexual males living in cities with large homosexual communities. The risk is thought to increase with the level of homosexual promiscuity and a history of other sexually transmitted diseases.
- drug abusers.

How does AIDS concern blood donors and the Transfusion Service?

There is a possibility that AIDS may be caused by a virus infection. In which case, if a donor with AIDS gave blood, there would be a risk of the virus being transmitted in the blood and blood products.

There is no absolute proof that this can happen. In America where around 10 million transfusions are given each year less than __ cases of AIDS are considered to have any possible association with blood transfusion.

check figure
7/12 or 20

Are imported blood products affected?

Certain blood products are imported into this country from America, where 97% of donors are voluntary and unpaid. Although there is no test at present which can identify AIDS, these products are as stringently tested for other diseases as the blood collected in this country.

emphasise

At present there is no screening test that the Transfusion Service can use to detect people with AIDS.

So how can the Transfusion Service help prevent the spread of AIDS through blood and blood products?

Until more is known about AIDS and an acceptable screening test is developed we cannot make hard and fast rules, but must take measures appropriate to the current circumstances. These consist of:-

- a general request to male homosexuals who either have several sexual partners or have had a venereal disease or hepatitis to refrain from giving blood until more becomes known about AIDS and a screening test becomes available.
- maintaining the existing policy of doing all that is possible to ensure donors are in good health when they give blood.

Donors requiring further information should consult their doctor or Regional Transfusion Director.

Will donors be questioned on matters of a private (sexual) nature when attending to give blood?

DEFINITELY NOT.

The Transfusion Service regards donors as highly responsible people, and consider it most unlikely that a person who thinks he may be at risk would attend to give blood.