

Statement from Sir Brian Langstaff

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11.30

When hearings finished in Aldwych House in February I told you that I would be making a further interim report about the framework for compensation before Easter. Today the Inquiry has published that report.

It is an unusual step to publish recommendations about redress in advance of detailed findings, but I could not in conscience add to the decades-long delays many of you have already experienced due to failures to recognise the depth of your losses. Those delays have themselves been harmful.

As you know, the Government has recognised that wrongs were done and that compensation should follow, and made interim payments in October. I believe that the Government was right to accept this. My conclusion is that wrongs were done at individual, collective and systemic levels.

I will set out the detail of what happened and why in my full report, but my judgement is that not only do the infections themselves and their consequences merit compensation, but so too do the wrongs done by authority, whose response served to compound people's suffering.

This has been described as the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS, and we have much to learn as a nation to help ensure that people never suffer in a similar way again. I will be setting that out in my full report.

Today's report is the culmination of detailed work on compensation. As you know, the Government commissioned Sir Robert Francis KC to give independent advice on a framework for compensation and redress, so that the Government could be ready for the findings of this Inquiry. The Inquiry has held hearings about it. Most of you who are listening to what I am saying have been fully involved in it, from your different perspectives. Sir Robert and I agree on the fundamentals of the design. Today I recommend that this compensation scheme should be set up now. It should begin work this year.

I am also recommending further interim compensation payments to recognise the deaths of people who have so far gone unrecognised, as I believe this is necessary to alleviate immediate suffering. It is a fact that around 380 children with bleeding disorders were infected with HIV. Some of them died in childhood. But their parents have never received compensation. Children who were orphaned as a result of infections transmitted by blood transfusions and blood products and have never had their losses recognised.

It is time to put this right.

Let me say a little more about the process leading to this second interim report.

I alone am responsible for the judgments and the recommendations it contains. But my task in reaching those judgments, and making those recommendations, has been made immeasurably easier by the way in which all of you – from whatever perspective – have put in a large collaborative effort to help me get it right. I would like to acknowledge that; thank those of you who have given statements, evidence, documents – often despite the painfulness of re-living some of what happened - and give a special mention to those who have given support to others, building a sense of collective comfort and solidarity.

So, what of the contents of the report?

I record in the report that some of the milestones that eventually led to the Government's acceptance of a moral case for compensation have been marked by the reactions from individuals in power when they have listened – actually listened - to people describing what happened to them and their families.

So the right place to start my report was with some of your voices, and that is where it begins. I urge those responsible for considering my recommendations to start there, listening to you and appreciating the depths of what you have experienced so that they, like me, can understand why compensation is overdue.

You can read more about my recommendations in the report. I would like to add something here about three issues which I know have been of concern to participants: in relation to infection with Hepatitis B, I recommend that Hepatitis B should be recognised like Hepatitis C and HIV. On the question of eligibility, I recommend ending the approach of a cut off date with no exceptions. And like Sir Robert, I am recommending that support payments should be guaranteed for life.

In addition, I am recommending that specialist psychological support be made available in England as it already is in the rest of the UK. To give you but one example, the most recent expert psychosocial report received by the Inquiry was about childhood bereavement. It concluded that the death of parents as a consequence of infected blood and blood products has '*significantly devastated a generation of children who they left behind*'. It must be right not only to recognise people's losses through compensation but also to provide the **specialist** psychological support not offered over several decades to people infected and affected.

The next phase of the Inquiry may prove difficult for many of you as the date for the final report draws closer. The closer it gets, the more intense may be the anxieties surrounding it: you may have had a foretaste of that when waiting to hear what I had to say in this report.

After Easter the Inquiry team will once more be travelling to cities across the UK to give you the opportunity to ask questions and talk to other Inquiry participants.

I will meanwhile return to preparing the full report and, rather like before we started hearings, the preparations must necessarily go on out of sight. As I said before, I can assure you that I will be writing the report as fast as I can, with the support of Ms Richards and my team.

The British Red Cross team who have been with us throughout the Inquiry and attended the hearings are available to support you in the coming months. Please do not hesitate to call them. Many people have said that they find those conversations helpful.

Lastly, it remains for me to thank you again for your support for the Inquiry. Though the report is entirely my responsibility, the Inquiry is very much a collective endeavour. Today is an important milestone on the journey to establish what happened and why, to learn the lessons of the past, and to make amends, as much as we can, as a nation.

I wish you all a peaceful Easter.