

Lord Archer

Thank you for your letter of 16th February.

The Government has great sympathy for those infected with hepatitis C and, as I am sure you aware, have considered the need for a public inquiry very carefully indeed. However, the Government of the day acted in good faith at the time and therefore we really do not feel that a public inquiry would provide any further benefit to those affected. In fact, actually believe that prolonging this issue may serve to prolong the suffering of those who have been affected.

The Government understands that patients with haemophilia, infected through NHS treatment, want to know why it could not have been prevented. However, all the information which is held by the Government is in the public domain and the Government does not believe that anyone's interest would be best served by a public inquiry. Since the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act we have released numerous documents which are now in the public domain.

Work has been underway within the Department, over the past few months to identify and review all the documents held, and relating to the safety of blood products between 1970 and 1985. This includes a number of documents returned by a firm of solicitors in May last year.

A draft report on the analysis of the documentation is currently being compiled, which I will be considering as soon as it has been completed. My former colleague, Lord Warner agreed to send a copy of this report to Lord Jenkin and I would be very happy to arrange for you to receive a copy as well.

In conclusion I can only repeat that the Government does not support your call for an independent inquiry and therefore it would not be proper for Departmental officials to appear before your inquiry.

Caroline Flint

Minister of State
Department of Health