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Ms Moriarty (PPS/SoS)

From: CMO

Date: 21 June 1996

Copies: Ms K Fraser PS/M(H)
Mrs Weatherseed PS/PS(H)
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Mr Lapsley PS/PS(C)
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Mr Griffiths PS/CE
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Mr Pilling
Dr Metters
Dr Rubery
Dr Bourdillon
Dr Skinner
Dr Jefferys
Mrs Griffin
Dr Ludgate
Dr Salisbury
Mr Middleton
Dr Wight
Mr Wilson
Ms McIntyre
Mr Jones
Mr Skinner
Mrs Lawrence
Dr Fielder
Dr Rejman
Dr Smith

CJD: CMO LETTER

1. **The Issue**

There is a need for all doctors to be brought up to date on developments on CJD via an official communication, preferably a CMO letter.

2. **Background**

No communication has been made on general issues since two brief Epinet messages were issued in March, the first alerting them to the NVCJD findings and the second giving reassurances about beef and milk. A further message was issued on 19 April, specifically about safety of pharmaceutical products.

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3. GPs, public health doctors and clinicians (neurologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians in particular) who have to deal with patients' concerns about a range of issues arising from the NVCJD announcement need an authoritative, comprehensive, but practical, document so that they can give appropriate advice and reassurances based on a clear statement of the facts.
4. There are no other current or proposed documents that bring all the diverse strands of relevant information together.
5. In addition, a large volume of correspondence continues to be received by the Department. Such a document would provide a very valuable reference point, allowing this correspondence to be effectively handled from a single source.

Proposal

6. A CMO letter would be a simple means of imparting what we know about CJD and NVCJD and their epidemiology. I have also identified a range of issues where the available information could usefully be communicated, such as:
 - Safety of Food and Milk
 - Pharmaceuticals and medical devices
 - Blood and tissues for transplantation
 - Cosmetics
 - Environment and occupational exposure
7. The document would contain nothing new and would merely be a statement of what is known, giving advice where appropriate (for example on gelatin). Dissemination of the facts will reduce speculation and the spread of mis-information, and ensure the best advice is passed onto the public, particularly about the safety of various products. It will also counter criticisms that the Department is withholding information.
8. The letter could be issued at the time of, or just after, the scientific briefing on 26 June, and would provide a useful means of distributing to all doctors the statistics that will be published on 26 June.
9. I acknowledge there may be concerns in some quarters about handling of information on CJD. However, I believe this would be a neutral move that would complement the scientific Press Briefing to be held on 26 June. It would be a letter to professional colleagues giving essentially scientific information and advice, and would have the advantage of being, as far as possible, a definitive statement of the issues currently. A copy of the proposed letter is attached - it is more or less in its final form, with the exception of an annex on the CJD Unit's activities, which Dr Will is providing.

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Conclusions

10. SoS is invited to agree to the issue of a CMO letter to give doctors information about a wide range of medical and public health issues arising from the recent report of NVCJD.

SIR KENNETH CALMAN
(agreed by CMO and signed in his absence)