

DRAFT

Dear Administrator Letter (to all RHAs)

Supply of Plasma to the Blood Products Laboratory

You will recall that this subject was discussed at the meeting of Regional Administrators with DHSS officials on 5 January 1982, following John Shaw's letter of 18 December 1981 which outlined the plasma procurement targets which would be needed for the increased production capacity proposed for the Blood Products Laboratory.

I am concerned to learn from several Regional Transfusion Directors that they are pessimistic about their chances of attaining the continued growth in plasma procurement so as to reach the targets set for 1988. Regional Health Authorities in some cases have not provided the necessary additional funding, and in others have not been prepared to give a long-term commitment to continued expansion to meet the targets set.

Ministers attach considerable importance to the matter of self-sufficiency in the supply of blood and blood products, and the procurement of the necessary raw material, blood plasma, by Regional Transfusion Centres is a vital element in this process. The construction of the enlarged production unit at the Blood Products Laboratory is well under way, and the potential of this investment will not be realised without adequate supplies of blood plasma.

ACTION

I should be glad if you would arrange for your Regional Health Authority to reconsider the steps it is taking to ensure that the plasma procurement target set for your Region will be met. John Shaw's letter originally set the targets as being for 1984-85, but a steady increase until 1987-88 is now in line with the phasing of the BPL redevelopment.

I should be glad if you would let me have your comments by the end of September.

PLASMA SUPPLY

Submission to NHS Management Board

Summary

The Management Board is invited to agree to the issue of a Dear Administrator letter to Regional Administrators reminding them of Ministers' commitment to self-sufficiency in blood and blood products, and asking RHAs to review their funding arrangements to meet the necessary production targets for the supply of blood plasma.

Background

In 1982, Ministers decided that to enable the UK to proceed to self-sufficiency in blood and blood products (with significant savings in NHS expenditure on commercial products) there would need to be a major expansion of the capacity of the Blood Products Laboratory (BPL) to process blood plasma into blood products. The blood plasma required for the Blood Products Laboratory is collected by the Regional Transfusion Centres (RTCs) of the National Blood Transfusion service, either by the centrifugation separation of whole blood donations, or by machine plasmapheresis of selected donors.

Plasma Procurement Targets

Estimates of the foreseeable needs in the late 1980s for blood products (in particular Factor VIII for treatment of haemophilia, and human albumin solution) resulted in calculations that some 435 tonnes per annum of the raw material, fresh frozen plasma, would be needed to be produced by the NBTS to enable the new BPL unit to function to full capacity. The new BPL unit is due to open in January 1986; it was realised that the NBTS could not provide a three-fold increase in plasma procurement instantaneously in January 1986. A phased increase in plasma collection was proposed so as to reach 435 tonnes by 1988. The increase in collection above 150 tonnes p.a in the period before January 1986 (which current facilities cannot process) would be stockpiled and used to take up the increased capacity when the new facility comes on stream in January 1986.

Regional Targets

The increased plasma procurement targets were calculated pro rata for catchment populations within RHAs. Regional Transfusion Directors agreed that they saw

no difficulties in finding the extra donors and collecting the donations, provided they were given funding to do so. The problem was explained to Regional Administrators in January 1981 (letter of 18 December 1981 at Annex A) and general agreement in principle was reached.[The economic savings to the NHS using its own manufactured products were clear in the long term, but there was a transition stage when RHAs would have to fund increased plasma procurement before they received the benefit of increased supplies of products back from BPL].

Present Position

Most RTCs have increased their plasma procurement so as to meet the present capacity of BPL (150 tonnes p.a) but some have indicated that their RHAs are not prepared to fund a further increase in plasma procurement; other RHAs are more sympathetic but not prepared to make a long-term commitment. (A summary of RTDs views is at Annex B): The Department is thus faced with a situation where Ministers' decision to achieve self-sufficiency, with major re-building at BPL investing over £24million, is liable to be frustrated by the unwillingness of RHAs to produce the necessary raw materials for the new plant to function.

Timing

It is believed that it is not yet too late for RTDs to expand their plasma procurement programmes in 198~~5~~6-86 and further so as to produce the raw materials in sufficient quantity to avoid embarrassment at a new BPL unit having to work below full capacity. Nevertheless RHAs need to take decisions in the near future if these increased supplies of plasma are to be secured.

Proposed action

The Management Group is asked to approve the issue of a Dear Administrator letter to Regional Administrators, asking them to review their funding arrangements for the necessary plasma procurement targets, and to let the Department have their views. Draft Dear Administrator letter is at Annex C. If the response from RAs is not sufficiently encouraging then it is considered that Ministers will have to be asked to raise the issue with RHA Chairmen.