

BRIEFING FOR THE PRIME MINISTER: 21 NOVEMBER 1995
(REVISED)

HEPATITIS C

I have great sympathy with those who may have been inadvertently infected with Hepatitis C through NHS treatment.

I am confident that the patients concerned received the best treatment available in the light of medical knowledge at the time. Since 1991, when a reliable test became available, all blood donations have been tested for Hepatitis C to prevent such infection.

Arrangements have been made to trace, counsel and - if necessary - treat those who may have been infected through blood transfusions. The Department of Health is also supporting an initiative by the Haemophilia Society to study the best way of supporting those who are infected with the Hepatitis C virus.

Compensation?

What the hon. member is asking for is compensation for patients where, tragic though their circumstances are, no fault and no negligence on the part of the NHS has been proved.

The House will understand the significance and implications of such a move. The principle involved is not one which can or should be lightly breached.

My RHF SofS for Health has reiterated the policy of his predecessors, most recently in evidence to the Health Select Committee (July 1995), that he does not believe 'no-fault compensation' is a sensible use of NHS resources.

Precedent already established by HIV

In the case of patients inadvertently infected with the HIV virus, the decision was taken, in light of their very special circumstances. Those affected were subject to significant social problems and were all expected to die very shortly.

HEPATITIS C

Republic of Ireland : background note

We are aware that the Irish government has proposed the setting up of a tribunal to determine payments for individuals infected with Hepatitis C, from blood or blood products, or in women following use anti-D.