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1st May, 1985.

The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke, Q.C. M.P.,  
Department of Health and Social Security,  
Alexander Fleming House,  
Elephant and Castle,  
London, SE1 6BY.

Dear Minister,

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AIDS TEST - HTLV3

As I may have told you in Montpellier, I am on the Board of Abbott Laboratories, a large health care company based in Chicago and with considerable investment in Britain. Abbott has developed a screening test which detects the anti-bodies produced in response to the virus that causes AIDS. Used in blood transfusion centres this test very greatly reduces the danger of spreading the virus by blood transfusions. The Abbott test, in common with two others, has received a licence from the Food and Drug Administration in Washington and is now being widely used by blood transfusion centres in the U.S.A.

All this is well known to your Department who are indeed engaged in evaluating the Abbott test for possible use in this country. The reason why I am writing to you at this stage is that, although I am myself no medical expert, I am getting a bit concerned at the rather slow progress being made in this,

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no doubt necessary, evaluation process. As I understand, the position is that two evaluations of the Abbott test will be carried out. The first evaluation should be technically completed by the end of this month: the Abbott people have been asked to deliver the equipment and train the staff on May 13th. Presumably, therefore, the report will be ready in the first week of June. I understand that a second evaluation, which would involve some ten thousand tests and the Blood Transfusion Service direct, may be thought necessary. Although no specific plan has been communicated to the Abbott people yet, it seems likely that the introduction of testing in the U.K. will be further delayed until this second evaluation is complete.

I realise that so far no case of AIDS due to a blood transfusion of U.K. origin has been detected, but of course we cannot know whether the virus is being disseminated in the U.K. by such transfusions because, as you know, the incubation period is protracted and may be several years. Such dissemination in fact happened in the U.S.A. at a time when the spread could not be prevented: it would be sad indeed if a similar problem arose in this country when medical knowledge is so much further advanced. I should be much happier if I felt that there was a definite plan for evaluation of the Abbott test with dates to which the Department would try to adhere.

*Yours sincerely,*

GRO-C