

BACKGROUND NOTE

PO 118310
John Austin MP

MS(PH) will be familiar with the request for the Government to hold a public inquiry into the issue of haemophilia patients infected with hepatitis C through contaminated blood products. MS(PH) will also be aware of the sensitivity around the destruction of past papers on blood policy.

In view of the parliamentary interest on this subject, we have recruited a member of staff to carry out a full examination of relevant papers, both registered and unregistered, to classify and record all the papers on this subject that are still in existence. We will also be considering how to make available papers within the context of the Freedom of Information Act.

John Austin's comments are very helpful. However, at this stage we do not recommend that we give details about this work, as this may raise public expectation about the release of documents.

We hope to undertake this work by the end of October.

We are currently considering the comments by MS(R) that we should use the powers under the 1977 Act for Secretary of State to commission a review of all the documents, with a view to producing an independent legal/judicial commentary on them and putting all these into the public arena. We were currently considering these comments which we were informed about yesterday.

Handling of documents returned by solicitors

Ministers have indicated that we should give high priority to examining the files which have been returned to the Department by Blackett, Hart and Pratt (Solicitors). We arranged with SOL to commission an initial analysis of what the returned papers contain to be carried out by an independent legal expert (panel counsel). This work has been completed and we will shortly be looking at the papers with a view to releasing documents under the Freedom of Information Act. We will keep Ministers informed on progress.

Blood Policy Team
12 July 2006