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From the Editor

28 February 1990

This is a standard letter which has, to our knowledge, been sent to over 40 mps.

Alistair Burt Esq, MP House of Commons Westminster London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Burt

I am writing to say how grateful I am for your support for The Sunday Times campaign to compensate haemophiliacs who were infected with the Aids virus through no fault of their own, as a result of National Health Service treatment. As I am sure you are aware, this campaign helped persuade the government to make f20,000 ex-gratia payments to 1200 haemophiliacs in November.

I would now like to ask for your continued support on behalf of an equally tragic group of people: those non-haemophiliac NHS patients who acquired the Aids virus through routine blood transfusions during surgery.

The exact total of these victims is unknown; but the number is estimated to be at least 50. In 1988 Tony Newton, then health secretary, admitted there were 42 known cases of HIV infection from ordinary blood transfusions. This month Roger Freeman, the junior health minister, estimated the number as at least 32.

The circumstances in which blood transfusion victims have acquired the Aids virus are almost identical to those of the haemophiliacs. Where haemophiliacs acquired the virus from contaminated blood products, non-haemophiliacs were infected by contaminated blood taken from donors, and the outcome has been no less tragic. Indeed in many respects their suffering has been worse, since non-haemophiliacs have not enjoyed the support of any pressure group, and had to bear the stigma of Aids.

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At least 16 non-haemophiliacs have already died. Yet the government has consistently maintained that it is under no legal or moral obligation to compensate these victims. Kenneth Clarke, the health secretary, said only very recently that the government had no plans to extend the special financial help for haemophiliacs to blood transfusion victims, on the grounds that the award to haemophiliacs was in recognition of their "wholly exceptional" circumstances.

Our view, which is shared by The Haemophilia Society and medical experts, is that the government has the same moral responsibility to this group of Aids sufferers, as to haemophiliacs. At the very least the government should extend the £20,000 ex-gratia payments to non-haemophiliacs infected by blood transfusions. It is estimated this would cost a mere £1m.

I enclose cuttings of three recent articles in our campaign for these people, and trust you will feel able to give us continued support. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

Andrew Neil

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Patients given Aids virus are refused pay-out

by Tim Rayment

THE government is refusing to compensate a group of hospital patients who acquired the Aids virus during national health service operations. After being forced by public pressure to help harmophilizes with HIV, ministers have decided to ignore others who were given contaminated blood.

The decision, which has outraged some MPs, emerged in replies to parliamentary questions last week. Roger Freeman, the junior health minister, admitted that at least 32 people had received the virus in blood transfusions, but were not entitled to support.

"Special financial belp which the government has made available for haemophiliacs with HIV recognises the wholly exceptional circumstances of those persons," Freeman said. "We have no plans to extend those arrangements ... to recipients of blood transfusions." The development has angered some politicians, who see no difference between the two.

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Seven weeks ago, after a campaign by the Haemophilia Society and The Sunday Times that was supported by more than 300 MPs, the government offered £20,000 each to haemophiliaes infected through contaminated blood products supplied by the NHS.

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Ministers argue that patients infected by NHS blood are different.

In his parliamentary replies, Freeman does not explain why. But two years ago, Tony Newton, then health minister, said haemophilizes were already suffering a grave illness which made it difficult to get a good job, take out life insurance or provide for their families.

Last week. The Sunday Times highlighted one example of the victims who are being ignored [GROA] 46, was given two pints of blood during an emergency hysterectomy operation at her local hospital. Two years later, she discovered she had the virus that leads to Aids.

Then she was an amateur athlete; now she suffers chest infections and joint pains that often confine her to her first-floor flat. She lives on state benefits of £26 a week and a small mobility allowance, with support from her boyfriend, who is deeply in debt.

"I don't see any difference between my case and the haemophiliacs," said one a who has kept the nature of her illness screet even from her boyfriend's children.

from her boyfriend's children.
"This is nonsensical," said Alf
Morris, opposition spokesman for
the disabled and one of two MPs to

receive Freeman's reply. "People will end up in the same wards, in the same pain, and because of NHS treatment. But they're saying, let this group go to court. Many will not live to see a court settlement, so justice—if there is any justice—will be posthumous."

The cases – estimated to total 50 now and expected to grow to at least 100 as others discover they have the virus – are from operations between 1979 and 1985, when screening of blood began.

Freeman's figures reveal that 15



Roger Freeman: 'No plans to extend help to blood transfusion patients'



Sir Donald Acheson: "Same outcome for HIV carriers, regardless of source"

of the 32 known HIV carriers developed Aids. Thirteen are already dead. A further 45 cases are, being investigated to establish where the transfusions took place.

Sir Donald Acheson, the chief medical officer, pointed out last week that the outcome for HIV carriers is likely to be the same, regardless of the source.

Sir David Price, Conservative MP for Eastleigh, who received a three-paragraph reply from Freeman, said: "The numbers are few, but that is no reason why they should not be treated with the same consideration as hacmophiliacs. I support The Sunday Times' campaign entirely."