

CONTAMINATED BLOOD SUFFERERS WITH HEPATITIS C BENEFIT FROM NEW PAYMENT SCHEME

The support offered to individuals who contracted hepatitis C in England from NHS blood and blood products in the late 1970s and 1980s is to be substantially increased, Health Secretary Andrew Lansley announced today following a three-month review.

The Government announced in October 2010 that they would be reviewing the financial and other support available to those affected. The review report has been published today together with a new package of financial support to those infected with hepatitis C.

To date, almost 4,300 people who were infected through their treatment have received payments. The review examined the clinical evidence for further support for these individuals, and also considered how best to provide support for families of those affected.

Currently, anyone with chronic hepatitis C contracted from contaminated blood receives a one-off payment of £20,000. A further £25,000 is paid if the disease progresses to more severe disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

The new measures outlined by the Coalition Government for those with severe infection include:

- ∞ introducing an annual payment of £12,800, for those with the most serious hepatitis C-related disease from NHS blood transfusions and blood products, in line with that received by those infected with HIV;
- ∞ increasing the one-off payment already made to those with the most serious hepatitis C-related disease from £25,000 to £50,000;
- ∞ making discretionary payments for those most in need; and
- ∞ increasing the annual payments for both hepatitis C and HIV in line with the Consumer Price Index.

At present no payment can be made in respect of those with hepatitis C contracted from contaminated blood who passed away before the Skipton Fund was established.

This will now change and a posthumous claim can now be made on behalf of those who died prior to 29 August 2003. Payments will be made to the individual's estate helping more families of those affected get financial support. This corrects an anomaly that has existed since the scheme was set up.

Other measures will also be introduced in England to make it easier and fairer for those affected by hepatitis C and HIV from contaminated blood to get broader support. Measures include:

- ∞ exempting these new payments from means-testing for social care services;
- ∞ providing the cost of an annual prescription pre-payment certificate to cover the cost of prescriptions for those who are not otherwise exempt from charging; and
- ∞ providing £100,000 a year for the next three years to selected national charities for counselling services for those affected.

Mr Lansley said:

“I fully recognise that the unintended and tragic consequences of these treatments have seriously impaired the lives of many people, together with those of their families.

“For too long those people infected with hepatitis C have received different support to those infected with HIV. We now intend to make the financial support for hepatitis C patients fairer and more comparable to the arrangements for those infected with HIV.

“We have listened carefully to the views of the families and campaigners themselves and I believe that changing the payment structure in England and offering the further assistance we have will improve the lives of these people and their families.”

Notes for Editors

1. For Further enquiries please contact the DH Newsdesk on 0207 210 5221.
2. Copies of the Review can be downloaded here:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_123363
3. There will now be a three month window for dependants to make claims on behalf of loved ones who have passed away. Anyone with hepatitis C who may be eligible under the new arrangements can find out more about what they need to do by contacting the Skipton Fund:
 - ∞ online at: <http://www.skiptonfund.org/Eng/index.html>
 - ∞ by email: apply@skiptonfund.org
 - ∞ by phone: 020 7808 1160.
4. The Skipton Fund was set up in 2003 as a company limited by guarantee.
5. The principal activity of the company is to implement and manage the UK-wide ex gratia payments scheme for people infected with Hepatitis C from NHS treatment with blood, blood products or tissue.

6. The company acts as agent for the Department of Health, which in turn acts for the health departments of the devolved administrations.