

CALL FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO CONTAMINATED BLOOD PRODUCTS

The Haemophilia Society is calling for a full public inquiry into blood services in the 1970s and 1980s in the UK to examine how virtually every person with haemophilia in the UK treated before 1986 was infected with the hepatitis C virus.

The renewed call for an inquiry comes at a time when the Scottish Health and Community Care Committee due to consider two petitions from Haemophilia Society members calling for a public inquiry into blood services in the 1970s and 1980s in Scotland.

Karin Pappenheim, chief executive of the Haemophilia Society, said: "There has never been an inquiry in England on this subject in spite of the fact that so many people with haemophilia were infected. Virtually everyone treated by the NHS with blood products before 1986 – some 4,800 people – contracted hepatitis C. Of these some 1,200 also contracted HIV.

"Scotland has already held an internal inquiry into the subject, commissioned by Health and Community Care Minister Susan Deacon. But the report was full of holes. It did not explain why patients were not warned of the risks of contracting the virus, nor why some were tested for hepatitis C without their consent or indeed informed that they had the virus when the results of the tests were known. The exercise needs to be repeated, not internally but publicly.

"The rest of the UK is no better, and no inquiry at all has taken place. If a situation where an entire patient group was infected with a dangerous virus by the NHS was to arise today there would be a major outcry. The fact that this infection took place in the 1970s and 1980s should not prevent an inquiry taking place now. Many people with haemophilia are living with the consequences of decisions taken by the Government in the 1970s and 1980s about the use of blood products in their treatment. More than 100 have already died from liver disease. A public inquiry is the only way to settle this matter once and for all and to ensure that a treatment catastrophe of such magnitude can never take place again.

More...

"The Society is meeting with Health Minister Lord Hunt on December 20 to discuss the provision of the safest treatment for the haemophilia population. At the same time we will also raise once again the need for an inquiry."

Ends

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Notes to newsdesk

Haemophilia is a genetically inherited bleeding disorder where one of the clotting factor proteins in the blood is either missing entirely or present at a very low level. In severe cases this can cause spontaneous internal bleeds, usually into the joints, which can be extremely painful and disabling.

Some 4,800 people with haemophilia in the UK were infected with hepatitis C through the use by the NHS of contaminated blood products in their treatment before 1986/7. Of these, some 1,200 were also infected with HIV.

The Haemophilia Society has been campaigning for the Government to hold a full public inquiry into the infection of the haemophilia community with hepatitis C, the use of the safest treatments for haemophilia and financial help for those infected.