

Independent inquiry into contamination of NHS blood and blood products

Lord Archer has published (23 February) the report of his independent inquiry into contamination of NHS blood and blood products in the 1970s and 1980s, with particular focus on the impact of people with haemophilia, of whom the majority became infected with hepatitis C and/or HIV following NHS treatment. (A public inquiry on the same subject was launched in January in Scotland under Lord Penrose.) Lord Archer's report criticises the speed with which DH and the NHS responded to risks of contamination, and the lack of an official public inquiry at the time. His main recommendations are: a statutory committee to oversee haemophilia supplies and services; free prescription drugs and other NHS services for haemophiliacs; guaranteed funding for the Haemophilia Society; increasing the cash payments made to those affected, and putting them on a statutory footing; and a further look-back exercise to identify affected patients. The cost implications – particularly for increased cash payments – are considerable, potentially running into hundreds of millions. The report has received wide media coverage and seems likely to require a response from Ministers. We are identifying the range of interests at DH and elsewhere (e.g., DWP, the Haemophilia Centre Doctors' Organisation), to enable Ministers to be advised on the implications and a response to be prepared. An initial submission will go to MS(PH) in w/b 2 March.