



Chisholm in hepatitis pledge

Health Minister Malcolm Chisholm has promised to consider fresh allegations in the controversy over the infection of people with hepatitis C from contaminated NHS blood stocks.

The Scottish Executive has pledged that those infected should receive payments of £20,000 to £45,000 in compensation but campaigners have been pushing for a public inquiry.

They stepped up their campaign in a protest outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on Thursday.

Mr Chisholm said the parliament's previous backbench Health and Community Care Committee, which lobbied ministers for a speedy compensation deal, had not recommended a public inquiry.

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GRO-A

But he promised to consider new evidence concerning allegations that health chiefs were aware of the risks of infected blood long before this was officially acknowledged.

More than 500 Scots are thought to have contracted hepatitis C, a deadly liver disease, during transfusions and other blood treatment in the 1980s before proper screening measures were introduced in 1991.

GRO-A of the Scottish Haemophilia Groups Forum, told BBC Radio Scotland that the protest was about much more than financial redress.

Mr **GRO-A** a haemophiliac who contracted hepatitis C and HIV from contaminated blood, said he expected ministers, officials and pharmaceutical companies to face criminal prosecution should "the truth emerge".

He claimed that "government propaganda" had portrayed the issue as an accident but he no longer believed this, claiming there was evidence that a possible link between haemophilia and what was later termed hepatitis C was identified in 1972.

'Spirit of openness'

He said: "This protest isn't actually just about hepatitis C or compensation; it's about the whole thing, the whole lack of justice and the whole kind of cover up which has gone on [with] the blood products and the infection.

"There's public inquiries when five people die in a train crash; well 5,000 people are going to die as a result of this and there's no need for a public inquiry, according to the government - and that's because they haven't got a leg to stand on."

However Mr Chisholm said: "The issue of a public inquiry continues to be raised, although

there was of course a report in the last parliament about these matters.

"And indeed the health committee in its detailed work on this did not support a call for a public inquiry, but if new evidence is presented, of course, in a spirit of openness, I'm happy to look at it.

"And I'm told someone is going to hand in to the Scottish Executive some new evidence, so of course we will look at it."

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/scotland/3119052.stm>

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