

17 December 2002

Briefing for Prime Minister's Questions

DH SECURES GUARANTEED LONG TERM SUPPLIES OF PLASMA FOR NHS PATIENTS

1 Accusation

National plasma shortage means DH has to buy US company to supply the NHS. Concerns expressed about safety of US plasma.

2 Facts

The supply of plasma therapeutic products to the NHS is critical to the treatment of a wide range of patient groups. Any shortage of these products would have a significant impact on healthcare provision within the NHS. Demand for plasma products in the NHS in England and Wales is currently growing at approximately 10% per annum.

Large volumes of plasma are needed for medicinal product manufacture, especially immunoglobulin. The UK stopped using its own plasma in 1998 because of vCJD concerns. The US is the preferred source of plasma given the well established pool of donors, the absence of BSE, the well regulated environment and the developed collection industry. No significant exports of plasma from anywhere other than the US have been identified.

An independent option appraisal conducted for the Department by KPMG showed the purchase to Life Resources (LRI), the largest remaining independent US plasma collector, to be the most cost-effective means of securing the sustainable long-term supplies of US plasma the NHS needs. Life Resources has supplied the NHS with plasma since 1999.

3. Elephant Traps

How can the Government justify spending around £50m on LRI when there are other areas within the NHS where funding is needed e.g providing all haemophiliacs with safe synthetic clotting products

Line to take

Without this deal, the NHS would probably have faced serious shortages of life-saving blood products. We are paying a fair commercial price for the business. This has been confirmed by our independent financial advisers. The purchase of Life Resources secures

supplies of plasma products for a wide range of patients, not just those with haemophilia. Ministers are considering the case for provision of synthetic clotting factors and hope to make a decision very soon

Haemophiliacs were infected with Hepatitis C and HIV from infected plasma products from the US in the 1970s. Why not again?

Line to take

The safety of plasma-derived medicinal products is ensured by the application of a large number of measures. These include inspections of collection and manufacturing facilities, selection of donors, screening of individual donations and testing of pooled plasma units for markers of infection with known viruses and, very significantly, the application of validated production processes which are capable of inactivating and/or removing a range of viruses.

4 Lines to Take

The NHS has been using US sourced plasma since 1998 as part of its vCJD risk reduction strategy. The US has no reported cases of BSE and is the only country able to supply the quality of plasma we need in sufficient quantities.

The purchase of Life Resources Incorporated is the most cost effective way of securing a safe and sustainable long term supply of non-UK plasma to meet all NHS requirements.

Life Resources has supplied the NHS with plasma since 1999. It has extremely high quality and safety standards overseen by the US Food and Drug Administration and the UK Medicines Control Agency.

Political Context

Key quotes

Public Health Minister Hazel Blears said:

“The purchase of Life Resources Incorporated will ensure that NHS patients will continue to receive life-saving plasma products such as immunoglobulins and clotting factors despite the current global plasma shortage. This is an innovative solution to meet the needs of patients”

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