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Subject: Octapharma: Visit to Plant in Vienna

Vicki

Pat, Mary, you and me have turned down invitations to visit Octapharma's plant in Vienna on 3 July to learn more about their FFP product, Octoplas. The company's PR person - Andrew Harrison - phoned me on Friday to express disappointment that no one from the Department was attending and tried to persuade me to change my mind. In Octapharma's usual way, he mixed sales pitch with threat, saying that if no one from the Department attended they would write to Ministers complaining that officials had neglected an opportunity to find out more about Octoplas which they regard as a safer alternative to the NBS product.

As you know, we have already met Octapharma to discuss Octoplas. NBS are sending 3 people to Vienna. I don't think there is any need for the Department to send a representative as well, as NBS can report back to us on their findings. However, I am free to attend if you think this is necessary.

You need to be aware that Octapharma see NBS as a competitor - and indeed one using unfair competition practices to favour their own FFP - which is why they want the Department there. This event is as much political as scientific.

Octoplas is a pooled solvent detergent treated FFP that will soon be made entirely with US plasma. However, the US plasma for Octoplas is processed in a plant that also fractionates plasma from a number of European countries leaving scope for cross contamination. Octoplas is licensed for sale in the UK but has a limited take-up because it sells for £40-£50 a 200ml unit compared to under £20 for a unit for NBS FFP. They don't yet produce a neo-natal FFP.

It may be that if we get money through SR2002 for a partial switch to US FFP, that Octaplas will provide a better alternative for some groups of patients than NBS importing US plasma and having to set up systems - in house or under contract - to treat it with methylene blue. But this will need to be assessed later.

Charles