Haemophiliacs 'denied funds for HIV therapy'

by Michael Day

HIV-POSITIVE haemophiliacs are being denied treatment which could add years to their lives, leading consultants claim.

The Department of Health has banned the funding of pure factor VIII anti-clotting agent from money earmarked for the care of AIDS patients.

Regional health directors have been notified of the policy change and already UK haemophilia centres are giving HIV-positive patients what they believe is sub-standard treatment with the impure factor VIII.

Haemophiliacs with HIV are angry, said Dr John Leslie, director of the Norwich and Norfolk Hospital Haematology unit.

'It's crazy. There is a lot of money in the AIDS budget and this cash would be a relevant source for funding the treatment these patients need.'

Dr Christine Lee, director of the Royal Free Hospital's haemophilia unit, agrees: 'By using pure factor VIII we can delay the onset of AIDS,' she said.

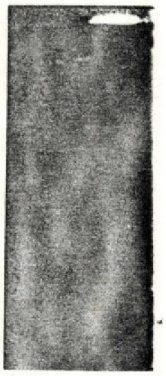
Dr Lee wrote to the *BMJ* in March this year citing 'convincing evidence that high-purity concentrate slows immunological deterioration' in HIV-infected haemophiliacs.

It is thought the numerous antigens present in impure factor VIII further weakens the immune systems of HIV-positive patients by causing other immune reactions.

Controlled trials have shown that in patients treated with pure factor VIII CD4 levels drop less quickly than in those treated with the impure factor.

But Dr Paul Walker, public health director at Norwich Health Authority, said: 'We looked at the use of pure factor VIII and decided the evidence of benefit was insubstantial. We had to weigh health gain against cost and we didn't think it was worth it.'

It would cost Norwich Health Authority an extra £24,000 per year to treat Dr Leslie's four HIV-positive haemophiliac patients with the pure agent.



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