

Your Ref: 052405CH

PO5016094

Nick Harvey MP

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS
Tel: 020 7210 3000

07 JUN 2000

Dear Nick

Thank you for your letter of 24 May to Patricia Hewitt enclosing correspondence from your constituent Mrs GRO-A of GRO-A about people with haemophilia infected with hepatitis C.

Mrs GRO-A expresses disappointment that the ex-gratia financial assistance scheme has not been extended to dependants of those who have died following inadvertent infection with hepatitis C. This was not an easy decision to make, but I think it is important to stress that the underlying principle of the payments is that they should be targeted to help alleviate the suffering of people living with the virus.

The payments are not designed to compensate for bereavement, although I fully appreciate the hardship and pain experienced by families who cared for loved ones who have died. I realise that this is little consolation. I do hope that Mrs GRO-A can understand the reasons for introducing the ex-gratia scheme within a healthcare budget which is limited.

I am aware that Mrs GRO-A has long campaigned for an investigation into the treatment of the haemophilia community and a public inquiry on the issue. We have great sympathy for those infected with hepatitis C and have considered the call for a public inquiry very carefully.

However, the Government position on this issue has not changed. As previously stated, the Government does not accept that any wrongful practices were employed and does not consider that a public inquiry is justified. Donor screening for hepatitis C was introduced in the UK in 1991 and the development of this test marked a major advance in microbiological technology, which could not have been implemented before this time.

I hope this reply clarifies the situation for Mrs Threakall.

Yours

GRO-C

CAROLINE FLINT