

HAEMOPHILIA

ISSUE

The Observer are running another article in a row about infected blood products and patients who contracted HIV and Hep C as a result. They have endlessly criticised for the fact the DH did not carry out a thorough enough look back exercise. They have also known for ages that several missing documents were destroyed by the DH by mistake. Solicitors hold copies of the destroyed documents and will return them to DH. Campaigners are calling for them to be sent to an independent body instead. And are also calling for an enquiry.

The Haemophilia Society met with DH officials last week and the Observer are claiming that we told them we had mysteriously found 45 new files relating to these people's cases. This is a very sensitive issue but we must stick to the line below. There is no more we can add to this story.

MEDIA REACTION

Department covers up fact they've found more documents

DH POSITION

At a meeting on 15 August with the Haemophilia Society, DH officials updated the Society on two issues in connection with past papers on blood policy.

Officials provided an update on work in connection to documents returned to the Department in May by Solicitors. The Haemophilia Society was informed that there are a substantial number of documents which we are reviewing.

We also updated the Haemophilia Society on work we have commissioned to identify existing Departmental files and papers on blood policy. This work is currently on-going. However, we will keep the Haemophilia Society updated.

ACTION

Line given to the Observer (Scottish edition) and the Sunday Herald

PRESS OFFICER

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HEADLINE: 'Destroyed' files on blood scandal may have survived;
HEALTH: HAEMOPHILIA;
Department of Health finds 45 boxes of documents

BYLINE: By Judith Duffy Health Correspondent

HIGHLIGHT:

Philip Dolan, who met with Andy Kerr

Photograph: David Gillanders

BODY:

DOZENS of documents relating to the infection of patients with deadly viruses through contaminated NHS blood have been "mysteriously" unearthed by government officials.

Earlier this year, the Department of Health claimed that files documenting information on blood policy decisions taken by the government had been accidentally destroyed.

But campaigners say they now have been told that around 45 boxes of documents relevant to their case have been found by officials in the department. They are calling for the urgent release of the papers in the hope that they will provide vital evidence about the long-running scandal.

Last week, campaigners in Scotland also met with health minister Andy Kerr to urge him to reconsider his decision to rule out a public inquiry. While in other countries so-called "tainted blood" scandals have led to inquests and criminal convictions, in the UK requests for an investigation have been repeatedly rejected.

Margaret Unwin, chief executive of the Haemophilia Society, said she was was told about the documents existence in a meeting with Department of Health officials earlier this month.

"We are eagerly awaiting information from the Department of Health about what is in the boxes, " she said. "It is just very mysterious that 45 boxes could suddenly have been found, it sounds like a lot of boxes to have been mislaid, so we would be very interested to know what is in them." Unwin said she had been told it could take six months for officials to go through the papers. She added that there was speculation they could be the supposedly destroyed files which detail meetings between the blood transfusion service, health boards and consultants.

Some copies of these documents have already been located following the government's announcement in January that they had been accidentally destroyed. It emerged some files were still held by solicitors, who subsequently returned them to government officials.

[GRO-A] a haemophiliac from [GRO-A], near [GRO-A], who was infected with hepatitis C, called for the boxes of papers to be immediately handed over to an independent judge to examine.

"I find it hard to believe these aren't the documents that they claimed were destroyed, " he said.

"We have no trust and faith in them to even safely hold these documents that have turned up, let alone the fact that they have an obvious opportunity to make them fit their version of history." He added: "The death rates for haemophiliacs currently run at one a week. A six-month delay while they look at these papers would result in 24 more deaths without justice." Meanwhile, campaigners who met with the Scottish health minister last Wednesday said they were "disappointed" with the outcome. Philip Dolan, chairman of the Scottish Haemophilia Forum, requested the meeting after Kerr dismissed recommendations from the parliament's health committee for a public inquiry.

Dolan said: "Despite all the documents, despite all the information we gave to the health committee, he still says no.

"He is quite happy for us to come and speak to him again, so in a sense he hasn't closed the door, but on the other hand we feel as if every time you get some information which is appropriate, he changes the goalposts." A spokeswoman for the Department of Health said that officials had met with the Haemophilia Society to give an update on the documents which had recently been returned by solicitors.

She added: "We also updated the Haemophilia Society on work we have commissioned to identify existing departmental files and papers on blood policy.

"This work is currently ongoing.

However, we will keep the Haemophilia Society updated." A spokeswoman for the Scottish Executive said that the health minister had had a "useful discussion on a range of issues" with members of the Scottish Haemophilia Forum.

"They both agreed to consider further some of the points which were raised, and the minister offered to meet again with Mr Dolan if that would prove helpful, " she added.

NEED TO KNOW

THE FACTS

Dozens of boxes of documents have been found which campaigners hope could provide vital evidence about the contaminated blood scandal.

BACKGROUND

Thousands of patients in the UK - including hundreds of Scots - contracted HIV and hepatitis from contaminated blood in the 1970s and 1980s.

NEED TO KNOW MORE?

www.haemophilia.org.uk Website of the Haemophilia Society.

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