

AIDS

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1. Dr Hunt

The attached draft, prepared in conjunction with Dr Smithies has been seen and agreed by Dr Harris. If CMO is content;

2. Ms E Mothersill

AIDS TESTING

I attach a draft reply to the Welsh Secretary's letter of 18 October. It also disposes of a related point raised in paragraph 4 of his letter of 8 October.

2. The reaction of Mr Edwards is understandable. He has been shown the draft report of the evaluation in the BTS of two screening tests. The purpose of the evaluation was to look hard for problems. As expected it found some. The report is a highly technical document needing expert interpretation. A group of experts examined the findings. The Welsh Office were represented on this group. The group were able to put the problems found in their proper context. They had no hesitation in recommending the general use of these tests. The performance of the tests since introduction has been monitored. Experience to date suggests they are satisfactory.

3. A fairly robust response is proposed. The introduction of a screening test, after a rigorous two stage evaluation, is one of the Government's most notable achievements in response to the challenge of AIDS. It is highly undesirable that another member of the Government should have such a negative perception of this achievement. Private attitudes can easily become reflected in the tone, if not the content, of public statements and correspondence. Damning the test by faint praise could lead to the very failure in public confidence which Mr Edwards wishes to avoid.

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