

Mr Pat Doherty MLA
Sinn Fein Constituency Office
1A Melvin Road
Strabane
Co Tyrone

Thank you for your letter of 1 October seeking support for the Haemophilia Society and its aims.

I have the greatest sympathy for anyone who has suffered harm as a result of health service treatment. I am aware of the particular hardship and distress people with Haemophilia and their families have suffered and continue to suffer from Hepatitis C infection. It is certainly a tragedy and all the more so that any infection should have occurred at a time in the 1970s and 1980s when treatments and quality of life had seemed to be improving for people with Haemophilia.

With regard to support for the aims of the Society I have set out in the paragraphs below my Department's position in respect of each.

On the issue of recombinant products, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has been working with the Health Boards to bring about, as soon as possible, the phased introduction of recombinant products for all patients. Currently these products are provided for children under 16 years and any patients previously untreated with plasma products. The DHSSPS is aware of the severe world-wide shortages of recombinant Factor 8. I understand that the Haemophilia Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) is working actively to manage this situation in a way that best meets the needs of Haemophilia patients.

As regards a public enquiry, you will be aware that on this issue, as on many others related to past events, the Health and Personal Social Services(HPSS) here acted as one with the Health Service in England, Scotland and Wales. The matter of a public enquiry into the infection of Haemophilia patients has been raised with the Department of Health, London (DoH(L)) who do not accept that there is a need for one. That is also the position taken in a recent report by the Scottish Parliamentary Health and Community Care Committee. The information on research into Hepatitis C and the inactivation of the virus in blood is already in the public domain and the Health Departments generally are satisfied that a public enquiry would not add to what is already well established. I will however continue to monitor any developments on this front.

Finally with regard to financial help it is established policy here that compensation or other financial support to service users is only paid when the health service or individuals working in it have been negligent. This was not the case with regard to the provision of blood products for the treatment of people with Haemophilia. As soon as the viral inactivation technology was available, in the mid - 80's, the health service introduced it. The HPSS here could not be considered to have been negligent. There are no plans, therefore, to award compensation in these circumstances.

BAIRBRE DE BRÚN

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety