

Mr Cashman

From: Dr R J Moore HS1A

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VIROLOGICAL SAFETY OF BLOOD

1. There is growing public awareness, stimulated by the AIDS virus, that many viruses can possibly be transmitted by blood and blood products. Whether one tests for these viruses or not involves a range of disciplines a) Epidemiologists to advise on the prevalence of the virus; b) scientists to advise on efficacy and availability of tests; c) transfusion doctors to advise on the practicality of testing and the cost/benefit of doing so.
2. The CSM Biological Sub-Committee is expert in a) and b) above but is not generally so concerned with the cost/benefit of their decisions. Whereas the NBTS generally lacks expertise in a) and b). The new committee will combine their expertise. Their remit embodies the cost/benefit concept since it is to minimise virological contamination and maintain adequate supplies.
3. From an HS viewpoint the new committee will be invaluable as a source of expert opinion. Over the last 2 years we have had several flaps when 'new' viruses have surfaced and policy regarding their testing has needed to be developed on the spot. The new committee should help considerably. My only fear is that it may err on the side of caution and want to test for everything. It will be up to Dr Gunson as NBTS representative to press a less stringent view where necessary. Similarly, where huge extra cost might be involved we would presumably need to be able to ignore the committee's advice if we disagreed and thought the cost of testing outweighed the benefit.
4. We originally thought the NBTS Advisory Committee - now defunct - could be resurrected in order to tap their budget. I now find their budget was a princely £50 a year! I am therefore discussing with FD setting up a new subhead for the new committee. It is unlikely to cost more than £500 a meeting and 2 meetings a year will probably be sufficient after an initial few meetings to clear outstanding questions.
5. I agree Ministers should be informed.
6. I do not know why CMO has called the meeting but I think he may be anxious about the relationship between the new committee and CSM. Our view is that the CSM is likely to welcome this source of expertise as long as CSM can be seen to retain its own authority at the end of the day.

GRO-C

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