

POH(3)5216/1

Jim Dobbin MP

06 AUG 2001



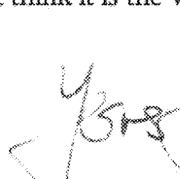
Thank you for your letter of 9 May about haemophiliacs infected with Hepatitis C through contaminated blood. I am replying on behalf of Yvette Cooper GRO-A

The Government takes the issues around haemophilia and blood products very seriously, and has great sympathy for anyone who has suffered harm as a result of NHS treatment. We are well aware of the hardship and great distress that people with haemophilia and their families have suffered, first from HIV and then from hepatitis C and there is deep regret that so many people were infected with hepatitis C through blood products.

The technology to make blood clotting products free from hepatitis C in sufficient quantities to treat people with haemophilia in the UK was not possible until the mid 1980s and it was not until 1987 that there was positive proof of means of eliminating the virus. As soon as the technology became available to make blood products free from hepatitis C, the NHS introduced it. I am afraid that there is therefore no legal liability to justify compensation for people with haemophilia and hepatitis C.

The Government's decision not to provide ex-gratia payments for people with haemophilia and hepatitis C as a result of treatment stems from the well established policy that compensation or other financial help to patients is only given when the NHS or individuals working in it are at fault.

You also mention the Government's decision that there will not be a public inquiry into this issue. The facts have been set out clearly on many occasions through debates in both Houses, at meetings with Department of Health Ministers and in correspondence. Whilst the Government has great sympathy for those infected with hepatitis C and has considered the call for a public inquiry very carefully, they do not think it is the way to go forward.


GRO-C
MISS HAZEL BLEARS