

AIDS - THE POSITION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Extent of the Problem

1. The incidence of AIDS in NI has been on a much lesser scale than other parts of the UK - 4 cases have been reported (2 deaths) and a further 29 individuals are known to be seropositive.

Measures taken to prevent the spread of infection

2. These have mirrored initiatives which have been introduced at national level - they include:
 - the establishment of a screening programme within the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service;
 - the creation of separate testing facilities at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast for those who think they may have been exposed to infection;
 - counselling facilities by trained medical staff;
 - the issue of general and specific guidance on the diagnosis and health care professionals;
 - the issue of guidance on personal protection measures;
 - support for the national press advertising campaign;
 - participation in the various national AIDS committees, eg, IDGA, EAGA, H(A), H(A)(O).
3. Local initiatives have included the establishment of a limited (2 hours per week) AIDS Helpline by a local voluntary group. More recently DHSS(NI) has set up an informal Group involving representatives of the Department, the 4 Health Boards and those clinicians most closely involved with AIDS. The aim of this Group is to provide a co-ordinated approach to publicity and education in the Province.

Resources

4. In the current financial year £200,000 has been allocated to cover the cost of screening, testing and counselling services.

Line to Take

5. a. Although the incidence of AIDS in the Province has been lower than other parts of the UK, the authorities in NI are no less concerned than those on the mainland to combat further spread of infection. Similar measures to those adopted in GB have been introduced in NI.
- b. SOS might wish to acknowledge the continuing support received from colleagues in NI to measures necessary to prevent spread of infection.
- c. SOS might wish to refer to recent discussions between the Health Ministers of Northern Ireland (Mr Needham) and the Republic of Ireland (Mr Desmond) when it was agreed that both countries had a part to play in the campaign of public education and ensuring that all possible measures are taken to limit spread of infection. Both Ministers agreed that the scope for joint action between the 2 countries would be kept under review.