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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
HANNIBAL HOUSE
ELEPHANT AND CASTLE LONDON SE1 6TE
TELEPHONE 01-703 6380 ext. GRO-C

Your reference
Our reference

20 August 1980

A M Macpherson Esq
Scottish Home & Health Department
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH EH1 3DE

Dear Angus

BLOOD PRODUCTS

1. As I told you when we spoke about a month ago, I have been sitting on your letter of 24 June to Peter Wormald in the hope that a number of things would become clearer. They are still not all as clear as I should like, but I do not think I should delay a reply any longer. Perhaps, however, I should begin by updating some of what Peter said to you on 24 June.

2. First, Ministers have agreed to the short term up-grading of the Blood Products Laboratory, and to an increase in production. We are aiming at Factor VIII production of 30m iu's by 1983/84. Increased production must depend on increased plasma supplies from the Regional Transfusion Centres, and we are talking to the NHS about this, and expect the new Advisory Committee (referred to below) to help.

3. Second, we now have a pharmaceutical company which is keenly interested in redeveloping the Blood Products Laboratory. We are ~~now~~ putting together a submission to Ministers, reporting on our discussions with the company so far and seeking instructions about whether we should embark on detailed negotiations. I am by no means convinced either that the considerations we shall have to put to Ministers will, on balance, make a strong case for further negotiations or that, if we do negotiate, the inflexible conditions which Ministers may decide we should lay down will be acceptable to the company. But that is a personal view. While we are preparing the submission on the possible involvement of industry we are trying to make some analysis of the cost/benefit of redevelopment with public funds.

4. Third, Ministers have agreed that we should set up the Advisory Committee on the National Blood Transfusion Service to replace the moribund Central Committee. (I believe that when you saw the submission it was called a 'coordinating committee'). Dr Harris has agreed to take the chair and we are busy recruiting members. We will of course invite you to the first meeting.

5. Turning now to your letter, I think that the development of the broad Great Britain strategy mentioned in your second paragraph should be facilitated by the new committee and SHHD's association with it.

6. I agree that all the questions in your paragraph 4 need to be answered, though I am not sure that answers can be pursued by one group of people. I should think we might have to tackle Departmentally the problems posed by the Medicines Inspectorate's standards, though we may well need to seek expert advice in doing so. The quality

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of blood products may be something about which the Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) should be consulted, but the quantity needed seems to me a different (though related) question to be tackled in some other way, and perhaps to be tackled first. Clearly the question of quantity is important both for the BPL and PFC and we must review existing estimates. What ideas have you about possible approaches to the problem?

7. We should, I think, get some guidance on your two final points, about fractionation methods and yields, from the STC's Protein Fractionation Technology Working Party which Dr Dunill is leading. Its terms of reference are:

> to evaluate the available and potential technology by which a new NHS fractionation facility can best process blood plasma to prepare therapeutic and diagnostic products;
>
> to take account of developments in fractionation technology, in tissue culture, in genetic engineering and in diagnostic assay requirements;
>
> to frame proposals in the light of the latest assessment of plasma fraction demands, having due regard to legislative and other safety requirements.

8. Returning to Peter's letter, he raised the question of how far in planning a new BPL we should take into account the capacity of the Liberton plant. Although he referred to our forbearance in pressing you on this point (and I know your difficulties have not been diminished by the Medicines Inspectors' report), perhaps I could say that it is becoming increasingly important to us to have an answer. If planning of a new BPL has to start without one we shall have to assume that Liberton can make no contribution (and, as Peter said, ask for our money back). Can you yet say how long it may be before you can give us firm figures?

9. The question of charging between the Central Laboratories and RTCs, which Peter mentioned, is one on which our attention is being focussed by our discussions with industry. I do not anticipate that we shall deal with it fully in our next submission to Ministers, but we shall certainly have to refer to it.

9. Finally, I should like to suggest that it might soon be useful for us to have a meeting on the lines of the one we had on 23 October last year (our second annual meeting, perhaps!). Possibly we could link it with the first meeting of the Advisory Committee, provided that is not too long delayed. Several of the matters of common interest to us are bound to be discussed by the Advisory Committee, but there are likely to be others (some of the above matters, for example) which the two Departments could most conveniently consider privately. How do you feel about this?

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

J HARLEY