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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Minister for Health

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Sir Philip de Zulueta
3 Westminster Gardens
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- 5 JUN 1985

Dear Sir Philip,

Thank you for your letter of 1 May 1985 about Abbott Laboratories and our arrangements for evaluating blood screening tests for HTLV III antibody.

Your information is quite correct, we do intend to carry out our evaluation of these tests in two stages. The first stage, for which the Abbott test and equipment has now been supplied, is a preliminary assessment by the Public Health Laboratory Service - this essentially will determine which of the various test kits available merit serious consideration for use in the National Health Service. It will then be necessary for the National Blood Transfusion Service to assess the suitability of various test kits for use in routine screening of all blood donations. It is not yet possible to give a timetable for completing this task.

I share your concern to see our blood transfusion service protected by the introduction of routine screening as soon as possible, but I am equally concerned to ensure that any test we do introduce is reliable and does not create more problems than it solves. The use of an unsatisfactory test could result in either the transfusion of potentially infected blood, or unnecessary anxiety for donors wrongly identified as antibody positive, as well as the waste of their donations.

I can appreciate Abbott's concern in this matter since your company was one of the first to market a screening test. However I hope you will accept my assurance that we are committed to the introduction of such testing as soon as we have identified the most suitable tests for use in the NHS.

GRO-C

KENNETH CLARKE