

CLOSING CEREMONY

Doctor David Owen, Minister of State, Department of Health & Social Security
Alexander Fleming House, Elephant and Castle, London SE1

I wish I could have been here for some of your sessions as I think the subject of your Congress is an extremely interesting one. As Minister with the day-to-day responsibilities of the Health Service (and I am sure this affects Ministers in other countries) I think we are conscious of a growing need to involve the people who use the Health Service to a far greater extent than hitherto in the questions of what service they are receiving from the Health Service. By your Congress putting emphasis on the social aspects of haemophilia and giving the opportunity to discuss some of the problems, not strictly always medical but social, family, environmental problems I am sure you are concentrating on areas where there is room for a great deal of improvement, for nobody looking at the Health Service in any country can be unaware of the fact, and I think many doctors and other health workers are becoming increasingly aware of the fact, that the Health Service has got to become responsive to the needs of the people who use it. In this country I very much hope that the Haemophilia Society will use the opportunity of the right of access to the Department of Health to put forward things which they would not wish to put publicly, perhaps some criticisms, some suggestions, improvements here and there in the Service which could be put to the Department at an early stage without causing any ill feeling and give us the opportunity to try and make the Health Service more responsive to needs.

This of course is the World Federation of Hemophilia and I would like to state quite clearly to you how strongly I believe all the nations of the World should support the objectives and the policies of the World Health Organisation and none more so than in the policy of the WHO that each country should be able to supply its own blood and blood products to meet clinical needs. The previous speaker, Doctor Rosemary Biggs, told you quite bluntly the facts which are that the NHS was not at present able to provide sufficient Factor VIII concentrate needed by haemophiliacs in this country for the management of bleeding, and that Health Authorities are having to buy expensive imported products. I think we ought to have made ourselves self sufficient rather earlier that we will now be able to do so. But we have made the decision in principle to become self sufficient. We have made a special allocation of half a million pounds last year and substantial progress I am glad to say is now being made in building up production capacity in our country, and self sufficiency of home produced Factor VIII we expect to be reached around the middle of 1977. There is still some argument about the overall level of supply that we should be aiming at and I am not certain that we have necessarily got it right at the moment. It might well be that as it becomes more readily available the products will be used more effectively, but I cannot stress enough to you, as an International Congress, that I think all nations, particularly the richer nations of the World, ought to be able to be self sufficient and not to drain the supplies which are often much needed in other countries in the World. I would also like to stress to you my belief and

our Governments belief in the whole importance of the voluntary blood donor system which we have had operating in this country very successfully for many years. Blood voluntarily and freely given by the healthy to those in need is I think a manifestation of the values which we should all strive to maintain in Society. There are dangers of the developing modern societies whose values are solely conditioned by the market place, where what is the price and what something is worth predominates. We should not be afraid, nationally and internationally to champion the true values of a society: love, altruism and concern for our neighbours which I think alone provide the essential cohesion and peace which we all seek in the World. The whole concept of a free blood supply is a gift relationship as one prominent sociologist in this country once wrote, and I believe can be a concrete example of society giving from each to another and I recommend it to countries which do not have one. I recognise the problems in some countries but I also believe that we should stand by the overall necessity of becoming self sufficient and when we are able to become self sufficient we must make sure that our nationally produced supplies through the Blood Transfusion Service are as good as the commercially produced supplies but then I think we could release those resources for other countries which are in need. Much needs to be done. I believe that the voice of people who have haemophilia and other illnesses needs to be strongly felt. I do not really like to use the word illnesses, because I think it is not wholly appropriate. Many of you live a full and useful life in society, making a contribution to society. Many people do not even know that you have haemophilia and that is to your credit and some of course are more severely affected than others. But your voice should be heard in all the countries of the World. Ministers in all the countries of the World should be conscious of what your needs are - we will not be able to meet all the needs of everyone in every Health Service, we cannot do so in this country, we will not do so in many countries, but we should be able to listen and to learn. You, I believe, by concentrating in this Congress on the social and economic consequences as well as the medical issues have done a service both nationally here - we will welcome you and we will learn from you - but also internationally. So it is in that spirit that I say that I hope this Congress has given you satisfaction, information, knowledge and I am certainly very glad that you have chosen to come to this country for the Congress and certainly judging by the mood and atmosphere of this Congress it has clearly been a great success! I am sad that I am only coming at the close of the Congress, but for those of you who stay on in this country for a short period of time I hope you enjoy yourselves and have a holiday and for those of you who have contributed and made this Congress possible, and all Congresses require a great deal of work, I am certain I speak for everybody who has participated by saying thank you. So, for me, it is a pleasure to have been asked along and I welcome all the pressure in this country that the Haemophilia Society wishes to put on the Government. As I said, I will not always be able to meet it, but I think that you have the right to put your case to Government and we must do our best to respond.