

tims were urged, some say coerced, into accepting the money. The cash accepted ranged from £21,000 to £80,000. This compares with a recent case in which a man infected with a variant HIV virus from contaminated blood during surgery was awarded £750,000 after a seven-year court battle with the National Blood Service.

Last week, an *Observer* investigation found that many of the 400 still alive are living in poverty. Campaigners said the latest revelations added weight to their calls for additional compensation as well as an independent inquiry. 'In other countries they have investigated the disaster properly,' said Lord Morris of Manchester, the former Labour MP who is president of the Haemophilia Society. 'In Canada there has been legal action. In Ireland, victims have been adequately compensated and in France people have been sentenced to imprisonment for their part in the disaster. But here in the UK, the government treats the victims with remarkable arrogance and disregard.'

Until now, officials have always said an inexperienced staff member was probably responsible for the destruction of the files. However, in a letter dated February this year, Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt stated that under the Public Records Act 1958 all departments were required to identify records requiring long-term retention. Such rulings, she said, would be made by a senior member of staff.

A spokeswoman from the Department of Health said that the victims' request for additional financial assistance was still being considered.

ON THE BLOG: YOUR SAY

Tainted blood victims • allege official cover-up

Letters reveal that senior civil servants destroyed crucial documents

by Lorna Martin

SURVIVORS OF Britain's contaminated blood scandal last night accused the government of a cover-up after doubts emerged about the reasons for the destruction of hundreds of critical documents. Earlier this year victims were told that paperwork had been accidentally

destroyed by an inexperienced civil servant. However, letters seen by *The Observer* reveal that only senior officers, who would have known that the 600 sensitive files should have been stored for at least 25 years, would have been in a position to retain or destroy them.

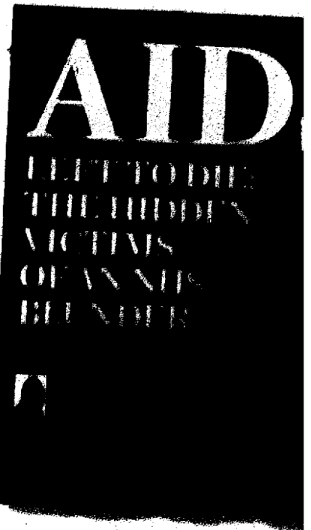
The documents detailed meetings between the blood transfusion service, health boards, government officials and

consultants during the Seventies and Eighties and contained critical information about what has become one of the worst disasters in the history of the NHS.

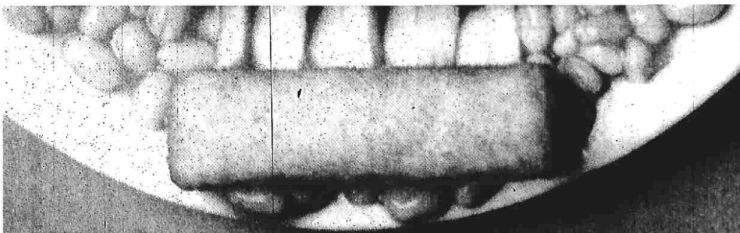
After several victims lodged a freedom of information request earlier this year, they were told they had been erroneously destroyed, some during the early Nineties and the remainder between July 1994 and March 1998. They were the only records

relating to NHS policy which 'vertently' destroyed during the 1990s and contained information on precisely the government bearing the risks from imported blood measures were taken to warn

FOCUS BLOOD SCANDAL







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still being considered.

ON THE BLOG: YOUR SAY

Our campaign has drawn a huge response, with many of those directly affected writing on our blog. Read their moving first-hand accounts and join the battle for justice at www.observer.co.uk

I'm a 31-year-old haemophiliac who was infected with HIV and hepatitis C when I was about six. They told my parents of the HIV when I was 14. Around this time I almost died of Aids. At 16 I hit the drink and started living every day as though it was my last. When I was 28 I was diagnosed with Aids-related cancer. All I want is truth and justice. (

GRO-A

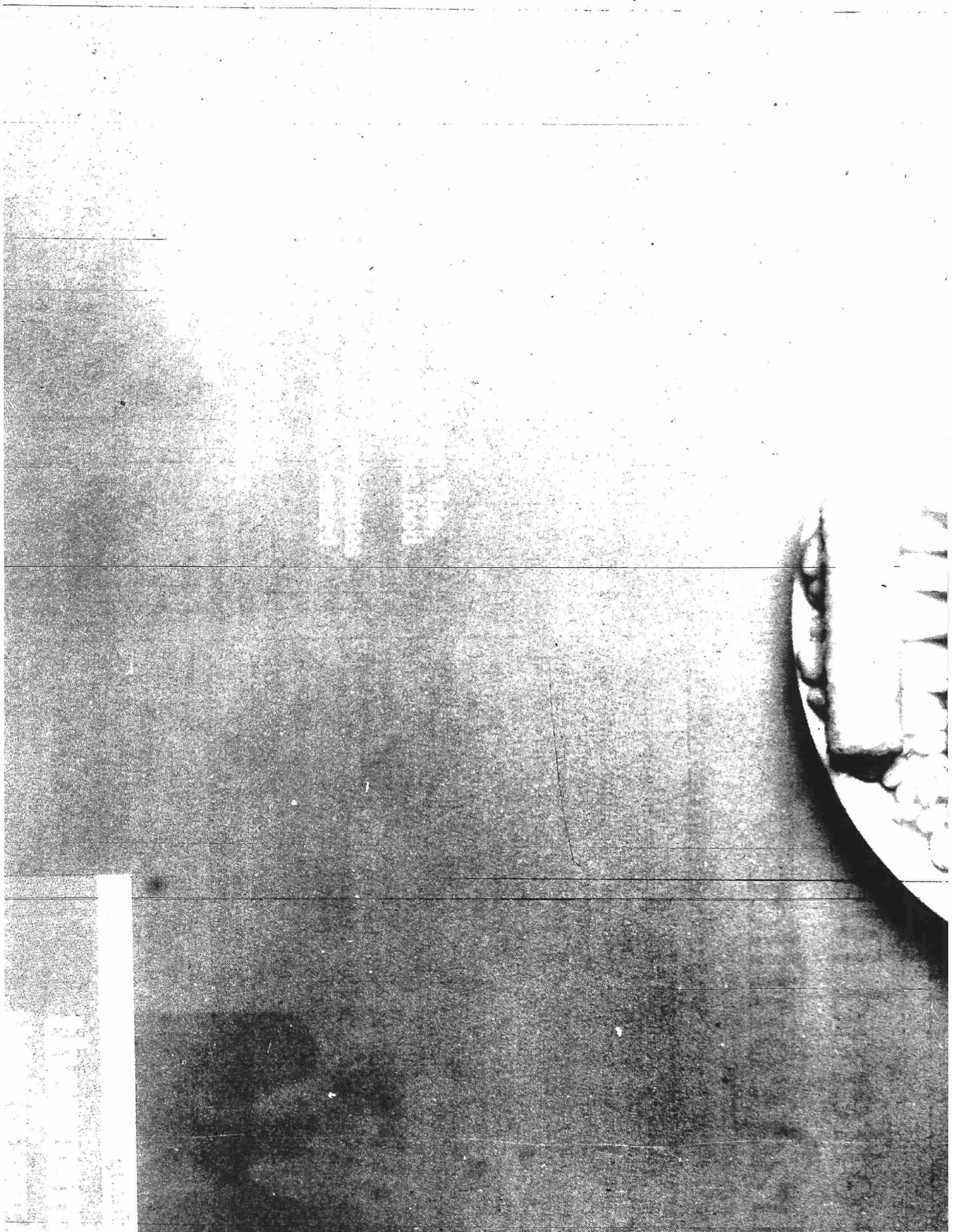
As a close friend of a haemophiliac with HIV and hep C via transfusion, and as a doctor, I am appalled at the government's apparent disregard for the destruction of over 1,000 lives due to 'mistakes' that have never even been apologised for. I support the demand for an independent public inquiry.

GRO-A

I am a trustee of the Macfarlane Trust which has appealed for more funding for survivors. I see letters from people who cannot afford to eat properly or turn their heating on because they have been put in a position where, due to their treatment, they have no money.

GRO-A

My husband died from liver cancer three years ago which was caused by hep C. He will never be here to see his now five-year-old daughter grow up. He



Good victims Official cover-up

Officials destroyed crucial documents

an inexperienced civil servant, letters seen by *The Observer* reveal that only senior officers, who have known that the 600 senior consultants have been stored for at least 20 years, would have been in a position to destroy them. The documents detailed meetings of the blood transfusion service, and government officials and

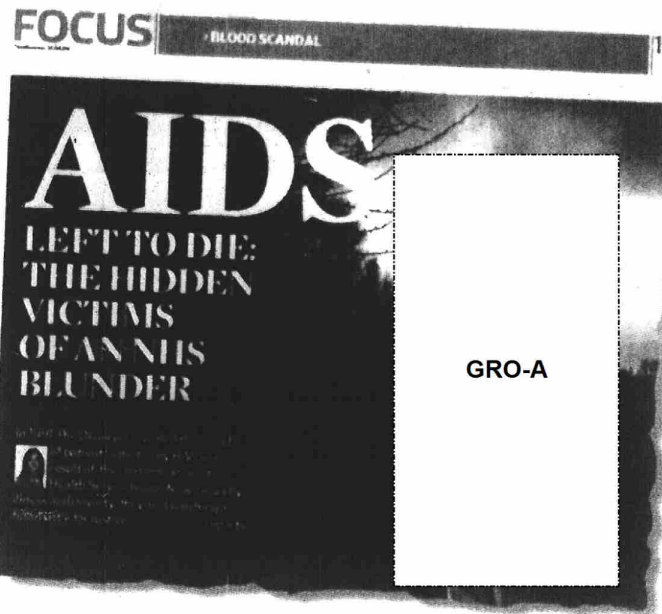
consultants during the Seventies and Eighties and contained critical information about what has become one of the worst disasters in the history of the NHS.

After several victims lodged a freedom of information request earlier this year, they were told they had been erroneously destroyed, some during the early Nineties and the remainder between July 1994 and March 1998. They were the only records

relating to NHS policy which were 'inadvertently' destroyed during the Nineties, and contained information on when precisely the government became aware of the risks from imported blood and what measures were taken to warn patients.

In a further development, *The Observer* has learnt that the shredded documents were the same ones the Tory government had gone to extreme lengths to suppress in 1990. When a judge ruled that they must be released, ministers, in an apparent attempt to avoid handing them over, announced a spectacular U-turn, offering an immediate out-of-court settlement to around 1,200 victims, mainly haemophiliacs, who had contracted HIV from imported blood products.

It is the only time the government has sanctioned 'compensation' without negligence first being proved by a court. Victims were urged, some say coerced, into accepting the money. The cash accepted



An *Observer* investigation last week found haemophiliacs such as **GRO-A** pictured, had been left in poverty.