



Department of Health and Social Security
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TO: All Regional Transfusion Directors Your reference

Our reference

Date 21st December 1984

AIDS: Chief Medical Officer's Statement

I enclose for your information a copy of CMO's Press Release on 20th December 1984 - this followed media enquiries after the report in the Guardian on 20th December 1984 of two cases of alleged AIDS transmission through blood donations.

Yours sincerely,

GRO-C

Alun Williams

Encl.

cc Dr R Lane, CBLA



PRESS RELEASE

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84/437

20 December 1984

AIDS - CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S STATEMENT

The Chief Medical Officer at the DHSS, Dr Donald Acheson, today issued a statement to clear up misunderstandings about donations of blood by a man who was subsequently diagnosed as suffering from AIDS.

Dr Acheson said: "Donations of blood and blood plasma have been given by a person who was subsequently admitted to hospital in Wessex in October and later diagnosed as suffering from AIDS.

"His donations of both blood and blood plasma have been traced, and all possible remedial action taken.

"His donations of blood were given to 3 recipients. They have been identified and are being followed up. Two of these recipients were a mother living in Birmingham and a 78 year old man living in Wessex - neither came from Brighton as reported in the Guardian. The third is a man aged about 40 from Wessex. All three recipients when tested have proved positive in the HTLV III antibody screening test but none of them has AIDS.

"His donations of blood plasma were used in the manufacture of one batch of Factor VIII at the Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree. When the diagnosis of AIDS was learnt, the remainder of this batch was withdrawn from use; however 38 patients, in Wessex and South Wales, suffering from haemophilia had already received some of this batch of Factor VIII. These patients have been traced and are being monitored; it will not be possible however to say whether any who prove positive in the HTLV III antibody screening test were affected by this batch of BPL Factor VIII or other commercially imported products.

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"None of the recipients of the blood donations or the Factor VIII made from this donor's blood plasma has shown any clinical signs of developing AIDS.

He continued: "I should like to stress that anyone who is advised to have a blood transfusion, or who has been given a transfusion, should not worry because the risk of getting contaminated blood is extremely small. Even if a person is proved positive in the antibody screening test it does not mean that he or she will develop AIDS. Only a very small proportion of people with positive results go on to show symptoms.

SELECTION OF BLOOD DONORS

Dr Acheson emphasised again that high risk groups-practising homosexuals drug abusers, and their sexual partners - should not donate blood. The NBTS is continuing to try to dissuade these people from giving blood. A revised leaflet will shortly be given to all donors.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCREENING TEST

A screening test for HTLV III antibody is being developed in the UK. As with similar tests being developed in the USA, there is still considerable work needed to ensure that any such test is reliable and suitable for routine use.

HEAT TREATMENT OF FACTOR VIII

The Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree is developing a method for heat-treating its Factor VIII so as to inactivate any HTLV III virus present. It is hoped to start heat-treatment of all BPL Factor VIII on a routine basis in April next year.