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Dr A Rejman
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Our ref

Your ref

October 17, 1989

Dear Dr Rejman,

I am replying to Dr Metters' letter of 18 September asking for information about HTLV I and Hepatitis C screening and their possible implementation in the British transfusion Service.

As you know the Transfusion Service has this month had its own deliberations about these things and I broadly agree with their view that HTLV I testing should be piloted anonymously in one or a few centres where there is a significant Afro-Caribbean population. The four questions to be answered are:

1. which is the best screening test?
2. is HTLV I prevalent in non Afro-Caribbean donors?
3. is HTLV I prevalent in Afro-Caribbean donors?
4. how good are reference laboratories like this one at confirming repeatedly reactive specimens?

To protect us all against the criticism that nothing is being done I think these studies should go ahead as soon as practicable with Department of Health support.

As regards Hepatitis C virus antibody testing, the case for screening is very strong and as soon as FDA approves screening by the Ortho test and/or Abbott test in USA I think we should endeavour to screen universally here. If we do not act fairly quickly and cases of post transfusion hepatitis attributable to HCV arise I think we shall be in a weak position.

I could enlarge on my reasons for holding these views - in particular I am very anxious that universal screening for HTLV I should not be contemplated unless the proposed pilot study shows that the anticipated non-specificity rate is manageable - but I think it better to leave this for discussion on 6 November.

Yours sincerely,

GRO-C

Philip P Mortimer

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