Reference .....

Mr Ghagan

AIDS: LETTER TO THE BARONESS MASHAM OF ILTON

I attach a revision of the draft you sent, expanded to include more detail on Factor VIII and cryoprecipitate, and to give the up-to-date picture on the publications of the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and the position on research.

I have also expanded on the position regarding Factor VIII from the USA.

GRO-C

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26 August 1983

cc
Mr Parker
Mr Fanning
Dr Walford

ENC

CODE 18-78

DRAFT

The Baroness Masham of Ilton
House of Lords

In our exchange in the House on 14 July following Baroness Dudley's Question on AIDS you asked about the possibility of transmission through blood products, particularly those imported from America and you made specific mention of cryoprecipitate.

Both cryoprecipitate and "Factor VIII" are used to treat haemophiliacs. Cryoprecipitate is a crude extract of Factor VIII and other proteins which is made by freezing human plasma followed by thawing. After the plasma is thawed, a precipitate is left which contains much of the Factor VIII activity of the original plasma, together with other protein "impurities". In the manufacture of Factor VIII concentrates, cryoprecipitate is used as the starting material and is then subjected to a series of further purification steps, depending on the level of purity which is desired, to remove the contaminating proteins.

There is, in fact, no conclusive proof that AIDS can be transmitted by blood, cryoprecipitate or Factor VIII concentrates. While no cryoprecipitate for therapeutic use is imported into this country, we are at present dependent on imports from the USA for about half our requirements of Factor VIII for the treatment of haemophilia. In March this year the US Food and Drug Administration initiated new Regulations for the collection of plasma, designed to exclude donors from high-risk groups. Although future supplies of Factor VIII both for export and for use in America will be manufactured from plasma collected in accordance with these Regulations, there is still a quantity of stock, some already in the UK and more in America awaiting shipment here, which has been made from "pre-March" plasma. The FDA has recently decided not to ban the use of similar stocks intended for the USA market because to do so would cause a crisis of supply. The same considerations apply to the UK supply position.

My officials have been in close touch with the Haemophilia Society about the AIDS problem and we are all very grateful to them for the constructive and responsible attitude they have taken. Naturally this is a matter of great concern to them; but they did not support the cries from some quarters to ban the import of Factor VIII because they accepted that the possible risks of infection from AIDS must be balanced against the obvious risk of not having enough Factor VIII. You will, however, be interested to know that I have arranged to meet the Society on 8 September to hear, at first hand, some of the problems they are facing. One of the topics I am sure they will wish to discuss is progress on the new Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree which, when completed in three years time at a cost of £21 million, will be capable of making this country self-sufficient in blood products.

I know that you are concerned about the problem of AIDS generally and I thought you might find it useful and reassuring if I elaborated on the points I was able to make during Questions.

We have been looking very carefully at our position on this matter and our medical advisers consider that the publications which have already appeared in the medical press provide sufficient and adequate guidance and information about this disease for practitioners, given the present state of knowledge. As I indicated on 14 July, information about the incidence, identification and methods of control of the disease is available on request from the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre at Colindale. The Centre has published in the Communicable Disease Report (which is issued to all Medical Officers ~~at~~ of Environmental Health), and in the British Medical Journal of 29 July, further information under the title "Surveillance of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in the United Kingdom from January 1982 to July 1983".

The Medical Research Council has established a working party to co-ordinate research into AIDS. One research grant has already been awarded, and there is already a lot of research going on in the United States.

We shall, however, be keeping the matter under close review to see whether any further Departmental action might be appropriate in due course.

THE LORD GLENARTHUR