



Northern Regional Health Authority

National Blood Transfusion Service

Regional Transfusion Centre

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Our Ref.

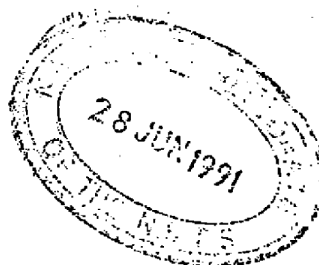
Your Ref.

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IN CONFIDENCE
NOT FOR CIRCULATION

24th June 1991

Dr H H Gunson
National Director
The National Directorate
Gateway House
Piccadilly South
Manchester M60 7LP



Dear Dr Gunson

Re: Hepatitis C Testing

At the recent meeting in York it became clear that the Second Generation HCV tests were acceptable tests for donor screening. The fact that many other countries have been testing for about a year now and in some cases longer, makes the U.K. position look increasingly unrealistic and very hard to defend.

You received copies of most of the adverse comments sent to me regarding my decision to start testing, but from what was said at the York meeting, I now feel comfortable that what I have done was correct and is defensible, and provides the level of safety that patients in the United Kingdom could reasonably expect.

Once the decision to start testing had been accepted in January 1991, any delay could only have been due to organisational problems, in which I include problems associated with confirmatory testing. The July start date was already a compromise based not on the best interests of patients but on convenience for certain Transfusion Centres.

Despite the fact that the Second Generation kits evaluation programme has not been completed, it is clear that testing must start 'come what may'. I think that I have interpreted what you said correctly in that you have told Directors that testing must start in September 1991 and cannot be delayed further. If this is the case, then the argument against my starting testing, that the Second Generation test kits had not been evaluated was fallacious, as were the arguments put forward by several others who wrote to me. The only valid arguments are two; one that I 'broke ranks' and two that I did not give other Centres adequate warning of my intentions.

The second of these valid criticisms resulted from my view that had I informed everyone earlier, pressure would have been brought to bear to stop me instituting testing, a course that I believed was right and am now even more convinced was right.

Nevertheless I would like to apologise to you for not informing you of my intentions earlier. I appreciated at the time that it would give you problems, but I could not take the risk of being forced to hold off testing until at least September and possibly later. This would have resulted in the transmission of Hepatitis C to many patients in this Region, something that was avoidable.

H/ 10

I am very disappointed at the response of the Transfusion Centre Directors in the U.K. over safety testing of blood supplies. The attitude appears to be very negative and I think that the United Kingdom has fallen behind many other developed countries. We should be at the forefront, not just trailing along at the end, and the letters that I received only go to show that attitudes are negative and defensive.

Although I do not wish to become isolated, you have already pointed out that there is an increasing distance between myself and the other Directors and the recent correspondence from some, including the disappointing comments by Dr. Wagstaff appear to be increasing the gulf. I would however ask that John Cash's comments about my staff not being suitable for inclusion in committees etc. be disregarded by yourself and the other Directors. The decision to introduce Hepatitis C testing was mine and mine alone. My staff have, as I expected, introduced the test with the vigour and enthusiasm that they bring to all their work. If I thought that my staff were in any way being discriminated against, I would consider that as a very serious threat. Some people who have seen John Cash's letter have even suggested that I should seek legal opinion on it's content, particularly in view of the wide circulation of the letter instituted by it's writer.

Could I ask you to confirm that you will not discriminate against my staff who were absolutely correctly and honestly carrying out their duties on my instruction.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

H L Lloyd
Director/General Manager