

HSB

Miss Wheeler
FA2B

From: J Canavan HS1A

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cc: Dr Rejman

Anti HCV Tests

We spoke briefly about the attached request from the NBTS Directorate for £25,000 to purchase HCV test kits.

Only recently has a test been developed by Ortho to detect the hepatitis C virus which can be transmitted through blood transfusion. Recent pilot studies in the NBTS (for which Ortho supplied free tests) and elsewhere seem to have confirmed the effectiveness of the test. The Advisory Committee on the Virological Safety of Blood will be considering the results at its next meeting on 6 November and may well advise that the test should be used routinely in the NBTS to screen blood donations.

However the test is not without some practical drawbacks. As Dr Gunson states, the next logical step in its evaluation would be to carry out field trials in a small number of Regional Transfusion Centres to assess the operational implications of using the test routinely. Ortho would not provide free tests for this two week trial and they would have to be bought at one-off cost of £25,000.

You will appreciate that viral contamination through blood is a sensitive issue, particularly now that the HIV litigation is getting underway. The press has already run scare stories about HCV and commented on the need to adopt the new test as soon as possible. Clearly we need to keep up the momentum in evaluating the test by getting the field trial underway as soon as possible. I understand that Ortho have given Dr Gunson first refusal on a batch of tests and may make mischief if a decision is delayed.

I should be grateful if you could explore with FA1 as quickly as possible how the £25,000 might be found this year. I should say we approached Research Management but in their view the trial is not 'research' which could attract their support.

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