

*Mrs Baldock*  
*The clear advice from ACVSB is that, as yet, the is not enough scientific data about the test marketed by Ortho for the Committee to recommend that it be introduced*

GRO-C: JJ Metters

16-2-9

1. Dr Metters
2. PS to PS(L)

from: Miss P Reenay EHF1A  
 date: 15 February 1990

cc: PS to PS(H)  
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### Non-A Non-B Hepatitis in Blood

1. This note seeks to bring Ministers up to date on the current situation regarding testing for non-A non-B hepatitis (often referred to as Hepatitis C) in donated blood. Ministers will be aware of the recent press interest in this topic, and of a number of Parliamentary Questions that have been raised consequently.

#### Background

2. Since the middle of 1989 Ortho have been marketing a test as a method of identifying carriers of non-A non-B hepatitis. There was no confirmatory test available at that time, and none have been produced to date (although we know that some are in development). The Department's Advisory Committee on the Virological Safety of Blood (ACVSB) discussed the possible routine use of the test in the NBTS at its meetings in 1989, but decided that not enough was known about the meaning of the positive results that it produced, nor of its reliability. A pilot study, using the Ortho test, was initiated.

#### Current Position

3. At the January meeting of the ACVSB members once again addressed the question of routine introduction of the test. The Committee's decision was that there was still insufficient scientific information about the test to advise its routine introduction.

#### Future Action

4. In April an International Hepatitis Meeting will take place in Houston, at which extensive discussion of developments in non-A non-B testing, and the Ortho test in particular will take place. The ACVSB therefore agreed to reconvene to review their decision at the end of April.

5. Ministers will be kept informed of any further advice from the ACVSB, immediately after its meeting on 24 April. Meanwhile work is proceeding on an assessment of the cost-benefit of such a screening programme, which would be needed by the Management Executive and Ministers in the event that the ACVSB favours screening.

GRO-C

Miss P Reenay

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