

Mrs Delfgou PS(PS(L))

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From: Mr J Canavan EHF1A

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#### TESTING BLOOD DONATIONS FOR HEPATITIS C ANTIBODY

1. We are asking whether Minister wishes to issue a press release announcing the introduction of routine screening of blood donations for the presence of the Hepatitis C antibody (HCV) from September 1991.

#### Recommendations

2. It is recommended that a press release be issued.

#### Background

3. In January 1991 Ministers agreed to the introduction of HCV testing as soon as possible on the unanimous advice of the expert Advisory Committee on the Virological Safety of Blood (ACVSB). At that time the technology was still being developed and evaluations of the screening kits were needed. It was found that the original kits gave many false positive results and so supplementary tests were also evaluated. Suitable second generation testing kits are now available and the Blood Transfusion Service is ready to start routine screening on 1 September 1991.

#### Publicity

4. The Department has recently settled the litigation by haemophiliacs infected with HIV through blood products. There is current sensitivity surrounding blood transfusion recipients who were also infected. The introduction of HCV testing may prompt further questions about blood safety; there may also be questions about why testing was not introduced earlier as it was in some other countries, whether the Department is making extra money available. However, these questions are likely to be raised whether there is a press release or news of the testing breaks in other ways.

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5. A Ministerial announcement would have the advantage of:-

i. avoiding accusations of 'secretly' introducing the test;

ii. allowing us to put the matter in proper context at the time of the announcement.

6. We understand that Scottish Ministers are proposing a press announcement.

Conclusion

7. We believe that the balance of advantage lies in making a low key announcement about the introduction of HCV testing. If Minister is content, the text of a suggested press release is attached at the Annex for approval.

GRO-C

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