

AIDS blood-research breakthrough

Scientists have succeeded in producing a blood-clotting agent for use by haemophiliacs which can be guaranteed free of AIDS, it was announced today.

The breakthrough comes days after the news that a second British haemophiliac had died from the disease after receiving a blood transfusion. But it could be two to five years before the product is available commercially as clinical trials still have to be carried out.

Scientists in Britain and America say they have achieved the success by cloning the blood-clotting agent, Factor 8. It will ensure abun-

dant and virus-free supplies and be safer than relying on homosexuals, who are most at risk from AIDS, not to donate blood.

On GRO-A it was announced that Mr GRO-A (33) who had haemophilia but was not a homosexual, had died from AIDS at the Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle. He had been taking Factor 8, as had a middle-aged man, another haemophiliac, who died at Bristol Royal Infirmary last year.

About 3,000 of Britain's 4,000 haemophiliacs need regular injections of Factor 8 because otherwise their blood does not clot, and they could bleed to death from a cut. The

Haemophiliac Society has urged sufferers to continue using Factor 8, which is made in Britain and the US and extracted from the blood of thousands of donors.

This means the blood can be infected, exposing haemophiliacs to the risk of AIDS and hepatitis, which can cause long-term liver damage. Cloning avoids this danger because the gene of the wanted product is purified and then encouraged to multiply.

This week's science journal *Nature*, announcing achievement, said it was a "technical triumph without parallel." It was achieved after years of work by researchers at Lon-

don's Royal Free Hospital; at Genentech in San Francisco, and the Genetics Institute in Boston, Massachusetts.

Dr Charles Rizza, director of the haemophilia centre in Oxford, said that the successful cloning of Factor 8 was encouraging. But he stressed that clinical trials with the product were essential. "It would be unacceptable to eliminate the risk of AIDS but substitute a new hazard," he said.

From April all British-produced Factor 8 will be heat-treated to kill the AIDS virus, but this reduces the product's ability to clot blood.

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