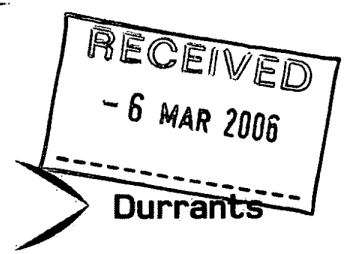


MM ✓
RD ✓



GRO-A
The Haemophilia Society
1st Floor
Petersham House
57a Hatton Garden
London
EC1N 8JG

Haemophilia Society

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Report defends blood policy despite 3,000 infections

PATIENTS would still have been infected with hepatitis C from contaminated blood even if the UK had not used imported donor supplies, a report said yesterday.

Around 3,000 patients with the blood disorder haemophilia treated with blood products in the 1970s and early 1980s were infected with hepatitis C, and many with HIV.

Now a review by the Department of Health has concluded that even if England and Wales had achieved a policy of self-sufficiency in blood products, this would not have prevented haemophiliacs being

infected with hepatitis C. But the Haemophilia Society said that the review was "a fairly blatant attempt to gloss over the details of the events at the time".

The society said that the report also appeared to try to lay blame at the door of the patients themselves.

The review, which focussed on documents from 1973 to 1991, said that some MPs had suggested infections might have been avoided had the UK achieved self-sufficiency in blood products, a policy the Government started in 1975.

But it concluded that even if the UK had been self-sufficient, the

prevalence of hepatitis C in the donor population would have been enough to spread the virus throughout the donor pool.

"Available evidence suggests that during this period not only was the Government actively pursuing the policy of self-sufficiency, but that NANBH (non A non B hepatitis) was perceived as a mild, and often asymptomatic disease," the report said.

It added that the advantages of treatment were perceived to far outweigh its potential risks - a view held by patients and doctors.



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