



## SUSAN DOUGLAS SPEAKS OUT ON TRAGIC CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

IT'S HISTORY now. But it's important to go back to the spring of 1983 to remember what happened.

In America AIDS, predominantly a sexually-transmitted disease, had reached epidemic proportions. There had already been 489 deaths.

The government had poured \$14.6m into research. Every newspaper and magazine carried

articles tracing the disease and every man, woman and child knew what the letters stood for.

But Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome was something of a mystery in Britain and it was to remain so.

That this was allowed to happen was the result of one of the most disgraceful and ultimately tragic cover-ups in the history of modern medicine in this country, and this newspaper's attempts to alert the nation to what was going on were firmly quashed.

On May 1, 1983, I wrote a carefully researched story warning that blood and blood products imported from America could be contaminated with the deadly AIDS virus and that two haemophilic sufferers in Britain were suspected of having AIDS.

The whirlpool reaction to the report was astonishing. Within hours of this newspaper dropping through letterboxes the medical establishment had locked its doors.

By the time other newspapers, seeking information for themselves, rang the Department of Health, a spokesman had been instructed to dismiss my story. 'The evidence is too slight for action,' Monday's national newspapers reported his words.

### Silence

Two days later the Haemophilia Society categorically denied The Mail on Sunday reports that there were two British AIDS victims. The society said there was no cause for panic.

The next day eminent haematologist Dr Peter Jones made a complaint to the Press Council about the 'sensational and highly exaggerated article, which started a chain reaction not only in this country but abroad'.

Not surprisingly the media was effectively silenced. Newspapers and TV were led to believe that The Mail on Sunday had got it wrong:

# AIDS

## This scandalous cover-up



that the story was alarmist and erroneous.

The campaign died there and then. Alas no one bothered to telephone Cardiff hospital where a man lay dying from AIDS, contracted via treatment for haemophilia.

No one telephoned the Bristol Royal Infirmary where shopkeeper GRO-A had suffered terribly for more than a year from AIDS, contracted from a batch of imported blood. He was later to die — but nobody said a word. Nobody wanted to alarm people.

Yet, alarm is precisely what soon — and still is — needed. Newspapers have a duty to alarm. I was accused by the Press Council and others of being 'alarmist'. The truth is my story was alarming. I intended it to be.

I wrote it because the function of newspapers in an issue of this kind is to force public opinion to exert pressure for action upon Whitehall and Government.

The scandalous way in which the facts about AIDS

### WHAT THE PRESS COUNCIL SAID

'THE SUBJECT was one of serious concern and a proper one for newspaper inquiry. The article contained inaccuracies but, more importantly, was presented in extravagant, alarmist terms not justified by the evidence contained in it. Its headline "Hospitals using killer blood" was unacceptably sensational.'

were suppressed in Britain should be a lesson for the future. This is a story not only of a tragic disease but of a battle against the establishment — a fight for the public's right to know and act in the face of danger.

It must be worthwhile now to examine what happened in this case, if only to protect us all for the future.

It has taken two deaths to force doctors and Whitehall to act.

How could we have allowed a national outcry to be bridled 19 months ago?

### Outrage

It is a question I have been asking since Dr Jones made it his personal campaign to silence me and this paper on the subject.

His expert advice certainly convinced the Press Council — experts always know best — which ruled in March this year that this newspaper had been wrong.

But even while that was happening the Communicable

Disease Surveillance Centre in London was totting up 14 known cases of AIDS in Britain, including five deaths.

And then in September the first haemophilic died — 58-year-old GRO-A — a man already desperately ill when I first wrote my story. We all know now what has happened.

Last week, by some tragic irony, a patient at Dr Jones's own hospital died of AIDS, transmitted in the fashion I described in the article he so vigorously attacked.

And Dr Marion McEvoy of the formerly secretive CDSC announced she expected 143 cases of AIDS in Britain by the end of the year — and more than 400 next year.

### Risk

MPs pledged immediate action to stop homosexuals — at highest risk of contracting AIDS — from giving blood. Heat treatments to sterilise American blood are to be brought in and there are plans to ensure self-sufficiency in Britain.

I am grateful for that — even though many of the plans are vague and still a long way in the future. I am grateful that the headlines and newswatches on TV are once again taking effect. For the media is now fulfilling its role again. And most by, I am grateful for the alarm at last generated in Britain.

But why didn't all this happen before? Because it was hoped the problem would go away without the public being disturbed. That, I fear, is the attitude of so much of the establishment in Britain today.

I have re-read my article of May 1, 1983. It was shocking. But it was true. I would not now change a single line.

The extraordinary activity of the last seven days has also come too late for at least two tragic victims.

## TIMETABLE OF THE WARNING THAT WAS IGNORED

MAY 1, 1983: Mail on Sunday reports dangers of importing blood from U.S., contaminated with AIDS and reveals two British haemophilic AIDS victims.

MAY 2: Department of Health states evidence of danger 'too slight for immediate action'.

MAY 4: Haemophilia specialists deny reports of two British victims — 'no cause for panic'.

MAY 5: Press Council

receives complaint from Dr Peter Jones over 'sensationalised' article.

AUG 4: DHSS confirms 14 known cases of AIDS in Britain. Five victims have died.

AUG 12: DHSS agrees to circulate warnings to homosexuals and drug addicts not to give blood.

SEPT 28: British haemophilic (GRO-A) dies of AIDS.

OCT 21: 24 AIDS cases

including nine deaths now known.

MARCH 18, 1984: Press Council censures The Mail on Sunday for an 'extravagant and alarmist' article.

SEPT 1: AIDS virus is identified by British doctors.

OCT 12: Test to screen blood samples for virus developed at Middlesex Hospital. Now 81 AIDS cases in Britain, with 34 dead.

NOV 2: DHSS promises to

screen blood and blood products next year. In USA 78 people have got AIDS from contaminated transfusions.

NOV 16: Uprrear in Australia as three babies die after transfusion from known homosexual with AIDS.

NOV 19: GRO-A 32, dies in Newcastle. The third British haemophilic to contract AIDS.

NOV 28: Junior Health

Minister John Patten says warnings to homosexuals not to give blood will be 'revised and strengthened'. DHSS announces that Britain's main blood laboratory will heat treat Factor VIII specimens from next year. Imports of American Factor VIII should end by December, 1984.

NOV 23: AIDS epidemic now claimed 99 victims in Britain, with 38 deaths.