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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WITN2365003

Hepatitis C

HEPATITIS C VIRUS

Background Information

Hepatitis C is a virus which infects liver cells and can cause inflammation of the liver. It was not discovered until 1989, and tests to diagnose patients infected with the virus have only been available for a short period of time. Early studies have shown that the virus is present in about 0.2% of the UK population (1 in 500), and is present in much higher frequencies in other parts of the world.

Infection with the Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis C virus is carried in the blood, so it can only be acquired by blood to blood contact. The following groups of people are at risk of becoming infected:

- (1) Blood Transfusions Blood used for transfusion in hospitals is now being screened for hepatitis C virus, but before the discovery of the virus it was possible to become infected through blood transfusions.
- (2) Needle Sharing Needle sharing among intravenous drug abusers is known to greatly increase the risk of infection with hepatitis C.
- (3) Health Care Workers Health care workers of any sort (Doctors, Dentists, Nurses, Hospital Porters, etc), may be exposed accidentally due to contact with blood products during the course of their work.
- (4) Sexual Contact There is a risk of transmission of hepatitis C virus infection during sexual contact, but it seems to be very small.
- (5) Mother to Baby Transmission from a mother to her baby has been seen, but again this is only thought to occur occasionally.
- (6) Others Tattoos, acupuncture or earpiercing with non sterilised equipment can transmit the hepatitis C virus. It is of course also possible to catch the virus unknowingly at any time by coming into contact (through a tiny cut or scratch) with the blood of a carrier of the virus. The cause of many infections (40%) is currently unknown.

Hepatitis C

THE HEPATITIS C BLOOD TEST

Hepatitis C infection can be diagnosed by a routine blood test performed in hospital or at your family doctors; it may also be diagnosed by the Blood Transfusion Service if you have donated blood. A positive test can mean a number of things:

- (1) Chronic Infection This means that there is ongoing infection with the virus causing long term low grade inflammation within the liver.
- (2) Past Infection In some people there is no evidence of liver inflammation, but they are still positive for the hepatitis C test. This means that they have met the virus at some stage in the past, mounted an immune response, and successfully rejected it. It is not known why some people are able to successfully fight off the virus infection and others are not. It may be that the response you are able to make to the virus depends upon the strain of hepatitis C virus that you are infected with.
- (3) False Positive Some people come up as positive on the initial screening test, but more sophisticated testing shows that the initial test is positive for reasons that are not related to hepatitis C, and the actual result is negative.

PART OF BOOKLET RECEIVED AT
INTERVIEW WITH DR GRO-D
AT UHW. CARDIFF. (SEE LETTER FROM
TO WELSH BLS DATED 26TH MARCH 1997.

GRO-C