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MSG/MHC

Dr. Ian Field
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1th May, 1983

Dear Ian,

Action on AIDS

Last week whilst you were away in Geneva a case of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in a haemophiliac in Cardiff who had received USA factor VIII concentrate was reported. The case fits the recognised criteria for the diagnosis of AIDS. In the Lancet of 27th April three cases in haemophiliacs in Spain are reported; I have confirmed that they received USA factor VIII concentrate. In the same issue of the Lancet the tally of 11 reported cases in haemophiliacs in the USA is recorded and a paper describes a case in a multiply-transfused child in the USA.

I have reviewed the literature and come to the conclusion that all blood products made from blood donated in the USA after 1978 should be withdrawn from use until the risk of AIDS transmission by these products has been clarified. Appended is a paper in which I set out my reasons for making this proposal. Perhaps the subject could be discussed at an early meeting with haematologists, virologists and others concerned so that a decision may be made as soon as possible.

In conclusion may I say that I am most surprised that the USA manufacturers of the implicated blood products have not informed their customers of this new hazard. I assume no official warning has been received in the United Kingdom?

Kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

N.S. Galbraith

ACTION ON AIDS

The temporary withdrawal of all blood products imported from the United States of America while frozen blood donated after 1978 is proposed, until the risk of transmission of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) becomes clarified.

REASONS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF USA BLOOD PRODUCTS

1. The AIDS epidemic in the USA is probably due to a transmissible agent.¹
2. The agent is probably transmitted by blood and blood products. In the *Lancet* of 30th April, 11 cases of AIDS in haemophiliacs in the USA receiving factor VIII concentrate were reported²; 3 in Spain³ also receiving USA factor VIII concentrate (confirmed by telephoning Ministry of Health, Madrid) and a case in a child following multiple transfusions is described⁴. (One of the blood donors to this case developed AIDS 7 months after donating blood and died of the disease 10 months later). On 1st May the 'Mail on Sunday' reported 2 cases in haemophiliacs in the UK; one of these, Professor Bligh's case in Cardiff, fits the accepted criteria of AIDS and had received USA factor VIII concentrate; we have not yet been able to identify the other possible case.
3. Although this number of cases of AIDS associated with the administration of factor VIII concentrate is very small in relation to the number of individuals receiving the product, this may NOT indicate that the risk is small because (a) the earliest cases of AIDS reported in the USA developed symptoms in 1978⁵ and, therefore, USA blood products manufactured from donations before 1978 are very unlikely to have been concentrated. Indeed, the earliest reported date of onset of AIDS in a haemophiliac is October 1981⁶. (b) Two of the reported cases of AIDS have been diagnosed in 1980 and 1982. In 1981 and the first six months of 1982 456 cases were reported out of 100 since January

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1979, 249 of them in 1982⁷. (c) The incubation period is long, between several months and two years and may be as long as four years⁸ and therefore one would not expect to see many cases due to USA blood products until a year or more after 1981/82 (unless blood products had been given).

4. Factor VIII concentrate (and pooled products) would appear to have a high risk of being contaminated with AIDS agent because homosexuals and drug abusers are known to be frequent blood donors and each plasma pool from which it is manufactured is collected from as many as 1,000 donors⁹. Furthermore, it is possible that the AIDS agent may be present in blood of healthy persons for several months before onset of symptoms.⁴
5. There is apparently no known means of ensuring that blood or blood products are free of the AIDS agent. The blood given to a multiply-transfused infant who developed AIDS had been irradiated before administration⁴ suggests the possibility of an agent resistant to usual means of sterilisation.
6. The mortality rate of AIDS exceeds 80 per cent one year after diagnosis⁸ and is expected to reach 70 per cent.

References

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