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Mr **GRO-A**

**GRO-A**

West Midlands

**GRO-A**

16 JUL 2009

Dear Mr

**GRO-A**

Thank you for your letter to my constituency office of 19 June 2009 about contaminated blood and blood products, delivered with a number of other letters from people affected by these very sad events. We will be responding to each of these separately enclosing a copy of this reply.

First, may I put on record again that this Government is deeply sorry for what happened in the 1970s and 1980s. I understand the significant distress, severe debilitation and the stigma that chronic infection with hepatitis C and HIV can cause. I appreciate the concern of haemophilia patients about their increased risk of vCJD compared to the general population. The lessons learnt from the tragedy of contaminated blood are important ones and I hope the steps we have taken to minimise any impact of vCJD demonstrate our ongoing commitment to securing treatments that are as safe as possible.

As Lord Archer acknowledges, there is no evidence that individuals were knowingly infected with contaminated blood and blood products. Although there was recognition at the time among the medical community that there was some degree of risk, it was not possible to test donors for these infections. The overwhelming consensus amongst the experts was that the risks were outweighed by the benefit that these new treatments brought.

I recognise that the progressive nature of HIV and hepatitis C means a number of your members have suffered loss of earnings. The ex-gratia payment schemes (the Macfarlane Trust, the Eileen Trust and the Skipton Fund) were specifically set up to provide financial relief for those individuals infected by contaminated blood and blood products and we will continue to support those affected through these schemes as outlined in our response to Lord Archer's report.

I know that your members are disappointed that we have not responded to Lord Archer's report as fully as some would have liked, but I would like to assure you that we are committed to providing support to those affected and to the Haemophilia Society. We have increased the amount paid to infected individuals via the Macfarlane and Eileen

Trusts and have committed to review the Skipton Fund in 2014, when that Fund will have been in existence for ten years. I understand that some of your members think this is too far into the future, but we consider ten years to be an appropriate length of time after the establishment of the Fund to allow it to be properly reviewed. I will ensure that the points you and others have raised will be considered by the 2014 review.

I must also take this opportunity to dispel any misconceptions and make it clear that this Government co-operated fully with Lord Archer in the conduct of his inquiry. Ministers were not invited to attend or participate in his inquiry. Lord Archer asked for someone from the Department of Health to meet with him and officials did so on several occasions. All the relevant documents were made available to Lord Archer who himself stated in his report that he found no evidence of a "cover up".

You will be aware that this issue was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate that was held on 1 July 2009. As Minister of State for Public Health, Gillian Merron represented the Government at this debate. I enclose a copy of the Hansard extract (and a link to the electronic version <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090701/halltext/90701h0009.htm#09070156000004>) which demonstrates that we will support any future parliamentary debate.

I hope this reply assures you that this Government does take this issue seriously and we are committed to openness and transparency in every respect.

*Yours sincerely,*

**GRO-C**

**GRO-C**

**ANDY BURNHAM**