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THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS - MORE GOVERNMENT MONEY

Barney Hayhoe, Minister for Health, today spoke of the Government's concern about AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). He gave details of the measures already taken to control the spread of the disease, and announced that nearly £1 million more money would immediately be devoted to the fight against AIDS.

Mr Hayhoe said: "AIDS is a very serious disease. Although the number of cases in this country is still small - by the end of August this year 206 patients had been confirmed as AIDS cases of whom 114 had died - we know that the number of new cases is bound to increase steadily over the next few years. Some 10,000 people may already have been exposed to the virus, but only a small proportion of these have so far developed clinical AIDS. It is vital to do all we can to control the further spread of the disease and to help those who have already been exposed to the virus.

"In this country we have had the benefit of learning from the experience of the United States where more than 12,000 fully developed AIDS cases have occurred. Knowledge of the disease is progressing rapidly and much has already been achieved but much remains to be done. In the absence of a cure for AIDS or a vaccine which protects against the virus we must take all the precautions indicated in the light of current knowledge and experience.

"The Department has already allocated £1 million towards combatting the disease, in addition to the resources committed by Health Authorities themselves. We will be providing a further £1 million this year. Part of this will be used to help the three

Thames Regions who are carrying the heaviest AIDS burden to provide treatment and counselling to those exposed to the infection. It will also be used to support the counselling work of Haemophilia Reference Centres and to provide help to the voluntary sector for the valuable information and advice work they are doing.

"A programme of public education must be the lynch-pin of our strategy to control the spread of the disease. We are urgently considering proposals for a national co-ordinated campaign of public education to improve understanding of the disease by those most at risk of contracting AIDS and also by the general public, and the ways in which its spread can be controlled. We must also extend our understanding of what services need to be provided for those who are infected with the virus.

"Important steps are being taken to safeguard recipients of blood and blood products from the AIDS infection. Preparations for the introduction of routine screening of all blood donations in mid-October are well advanced. The blood clotting agent Factor VIII needed by haemophiliacs is now being heat treated. And the major redevelopment, costing £38 million, of the Blood Products Laboratory in Elstree should ensure our self-sufficiency in blood products by the end of 1986.

"Problems caused by the spread of the AIDS infection are likely to be with us for a long time. It is important that our response to these problems and the wider issues raised by the disease is properly co-ordinated. I believe that a Ministerial group would assist in sharpening up our arrangements for ensuring inter-departmental co-operation between all the Departments concerned with AIDS matters, and urgent action to establish such a group is in hand.

"The Government fully understands public concern about AIDS. This terrible disease is being tackled on a broad front and with the continuing co-operation of all concerned and particularly those in the at-risk groups. I am hopeful that together we will be able to control the spread of the infection and reduce the appalling suffering which accompanies the disease."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Listed below are details of the additional funding being provided this year as well as that previously announced, and the major measures already taken and planned to control the spread of the disease.

- * funding
- * health education
- * screening of blood donations
- * other blood testing
- * heat treatment of blood products
- * counselling
- * research
- * information for health professionals
- * co-operation with the voluntary sector
- * setting up of an advisory group of experts
- * confidentiality.

Funding

The Government has so far contributed nearly £1 million directly towards the fight against AIDS in addition to resources already committed by Health Authorities. Besides funding various research projects the Government has contributed:

- £50,000 for the training programme for counsellors
- £58,000 for evaluating screening tests at PHLS
- £80,000 for evaluating screening tests in the NBTS
- £750,000 for testing blood samples at PHLS
- £25,000 for the Terrence Higgins Trust
- £15,000 for the Haemophilia Society

£978,000

Additional funding announced today for this financial year will be:

NE Thames RHA	£275,000	} for upgrading outpatient facilities, for counselling and for in-patient and out-patient treatment
NW Thames RHA	£275,000	
SE Thames RHA	£130,000	
Haemophiliac Reference Centres	£90,000	for counselling
Terrence Higgins Trust	£10,000	for development of a counselling package
Haemophilia Society	£20,000	for advice work
	£12,000	for national conference on AIDS for health professionals
Public Health Education Project	£100,000	
	<u>£912,000</u>	

Health Education

The main at-risk groups are homosexual and bisexual men; intravenous drug abusers; haemophiliacs who have received contaminated blood products; and the sexual contacts of people in these groups. Information leaflets have been produced by the Health Education Council, the Haemophilia Society and the Terrence Higgins Trust. A leaflet warning those in the at-risk groups not to give blood has also been produced for the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS).

Screening of Blood Donations

The risk of contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion is already extremely small, but the planned introduction of a screening test within the NBTS will reduce this risk still further. All the commercially available screening tests have been evaluated by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) and two kits are now being tested in the NBTS. Routine screening of all blood donations should be introduced by mid-October.

Other Blood Testing

Health authorities are also making arrangements for blood samples to be taken in sexually transmitted disease clinics and elsewhere so that people who are worried that they may have been exposed to the virus can have their blood tested to discover whether they are antibody positive.

Counselling

Anyone whose blood is found to contain antibodies to the AIDS virus will be offered counselling, which will also extend to families and friends. A counselling training course has been developed at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, and over 180 people will be trained by the time the blood test becomes available in October.

Research

The Government-funded Medical Research Council is co-ordinating a number of important research projects costing nearly £400,000. The MRC also maintains valuable links with researchers working in the United States and elsewhere.

Information for Health Professionals

Special guidance has been produced for groups of health professionals who are involved in caring for AIDS patients. This has included:

- general information for doctors on the diagnosis of the disease and infection control measures
- information for nurses on the care of patients living in the community
- guidelines of safety measures for health workers and those working in the emergency services.

Co-operation with the Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector has a major role to play in offering advice, support and counselling. The Government has already given £25,000 to the Terrence Higgins Trust to support its work on AIDS and £15,000 to the Haemophilia Society in addition to the sums announced today.

Expert Advisory Group on AIDS

The introduction of all these measures in such a short time has been made possible by the setting up of an advisory group of experts on AIDS (EAGA). Sub-groups of EAGA work on various topics such as counselling and blood testing and give advice on the policies to adopt.

Monitoring

The Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC), which is part of the PHLS, began national surveillance of AIDS in 1982. They have close contact with similar centres in other countries including the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States and the WHO AIDS Collaborating Centre for Europe in Paris.

Confidentiality

A letter has been sent to all health authorities reminding them that anyone who goes for a blood test at a sexually transmitted disease clinic must be treated under terms of strict confidentiality. AIDS patients, those found to be antibody positive and any who are treated at STD clinics are protected by the NHS (Venereal Diseases) Regulations 1974.