

Department of Health
and Social Security

PRESS RELEASE

Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

Not for publication, broadcast or use on club tapes before
00.01 hours on 29 April 1987. This document is issued in advance
on the strict understanding that no approach is made to any
organisation or person about its contents before the time of
publication.

87/186

28 April 1987

NEW BLOOD PRODUCTS MANUFACTURING UNIT OPENED

A new production unit at the Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree, was officially opened today (Wednesday, 29 April) by Her Royal Highness The Duchess Of Gloucester.

The new unit will use some of the most advanced techniques and equipment of its kind to process human plasma into a number of vital blood products. It has three times the processing capacity of the old plant and will enable England and Wales to be self-sufficient in such products.

Welcoming the completion of the new building, Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services said: "The Government has attached great importance to the goal of self-sufficiency and has used a fast-track contracting method to ensure that this complex pharmaceutical facility was completed as quickly as possible. It is only three years since I laid the Foundation Stone at the start of construction in March 1984.

"Over £55 million has been committed to the project and it has been estimated that once the new laboratory is fully operational it will be able to make products worth up to £60 million a year for the National Health Service.

"The complicated process of starting up the plant has already

(MORE)

begun. Limited production will start later this year and next year should provide England and Wales with 75 per cent of their needs as the new plant begins to come fully on stream. Self-sufficiency will be completely achieved in 1989 and we will no longer need to rely on costly imported blood products.

"This new manufacturing unit at the Blood Products Laboratory represents a significant improvement to the Health Service. The people who have worked so hard to bring it to fruition and those who will work in it can be justifiably proud. The tremendously important role of our voluntary blood donors in the goal of achieving self-sufficiency in blood products should also not go unacknowledged. They have responded magnificently to the call from the National Blood Transfusion Service for more donations to ensure that the new plant will have sufficient supplies of the essential plasma to meet its demands."

(END)

Notes for Editors

1. The Blood Products Laboratory (BPL) is managed by the Central Blood Laboratories Authority which is a Special Health Authority set up within the NHS in 1982.
2. The BPL is provided with human blood plasma by the National Blood Transfusion Service. Plasma is the clear liquid part of blood which remains after the blood cells have been removed.
3. The blood plasma itself is separated into a variety of components by BPL by a process called fractionation. More than 20 different therapeutic products can be made from plasma. Those in greatest demand are albumin, used for burns victims, and Factor VIII, used for treatment of haemophiliacs. They also manufacture immunoglobulins which are used to increase patients' resistance to a range of infections.
4. BPL Diagnostics manufacture diagnostic reagents which are used by Regional Transfusion Centres and hospital blood banks to identify blood groups.
5. BPL can only meet around 50 per cent of the present NHS demand for albumin and about 30 per cent of Factor VIII, so some of these products are imported. The new laboratory will eliminate the need for these imports. Neither blood nor plasma is imported.
6. The new laboratory will process 450,000 litres of blood plasma every year.