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20 APR 2002

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Dear Paul,
Thank you for your letters of 3 October and 6 December to Alan Milburn concerning Mrs [GRO-A] Manchester about compensation for people with haemophilia infected with hepatitis C through NHS blood products. I apologise for the long delay in replying.

In your letter of 6 December you have referred to a further letter dated 29 August 2001. A reply was sent to you on 11 February. A copy is enclosed. In this letter I have explained the issues raised by Mrs [GRO-A] surrounding the statement made by Lord Owen that the UK would be self sufficient in producing clotting products for haemophilia patients.

In her letter of 3 October Mrs [GRO-A] has referred to the Early Day Motion that Mr Milburn signed in opposition calling on the Government to consider giving financial assistance to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C. When this Government came into office we reviewed the decision taken by the previous Government not to offer financial assistance to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C. At this time we met with the Haemophilia Society and carefully considered the evidence they presented. The decision – and it was not an easy one to take – was that we could not make an exception in this case to the general rule that compensation or financial help is only given when the NHS or individuals working in it have been at fault.

As a member of the All Party Group on Haemophilia you will be aware that I met the Haemophilia Society and Michael Connarty on the 12th June to discuss the Society's "Report of the Hepatitis C Working Party". The report provides costed proposals for financial assistance for those with haemophilia who contracted hepatitis C. We are continuing to look at the report and will respond when we have given it full consideration.

Mrs Bates has also asked again about a public inquiry into issues surrounding haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through NHS blood products. The facts have been set out clearly on many occasions through debates in both Houses, at meetings with Department of Health Ministers and in correspondence. Whilst the Government has great sympathy for those infected with hepatitis C and has considered the call for a public inquiry very carefully, all the information is in the public domain and we do not think it is the way forward.

[GRO-C]

HAZEL BLEARS

*I am sorry for the unacceptable delay
in replying to your correspondence.*

[GRO-C]