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Tainted justice

● IT is good news that 1,200 haemophiliacs are finally to win decent financial compensation after their infection with the HIV virus through NHS blood transfusions.

But it is a scandal that they are set to win justice seven long years after first reports of blood contamination reached Britain.

Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke will have to live with the shame of the Government's failure to recognise its responsibilities for the rest of his life.

But, unlike many of the victims whose court case he has fought every inch of the way, he at least will still have a life to live.

Lawyers thrash out £80 m deal

H EALTH Secretary Kenneth Clarke is set to make a multi-million pound climb-down over haemophiliacs who caught the AIDS virus from blood transfusions.

Government lawyers and the victims are holding secret talks to hammer out a deal.

Sufferers with the HIV virus or full-blown AIDS will at least double the payment of £28,000 they have so far received through a Government-funded trust.

But it will mean that the Government will NOT admit liability for infection being passed on by NHS transfusions.

Mr Clarke has refused to pull out of the court case brought against the Government by the haemophiliacs - despite a plea from the judge at a preliminary hearing for a speedy settlement.

Supporters of the 1,200 victims were confident last night that the Government wants to avoid going through an embarrassing court case.

Pressure for action will come in Parliament this week when Labour Health spokeswoman Harriet Harman brings in a Bill to give medical mishap victims automatic compensation.

Lawyers for the haemophiliacs infected by imported blood are pressing the Health Department to come up with

EXCLUSIVE
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more than £80 million in extra compensation.

That would give the victims' families as much as £100,000 more each. It is understood lawyers are trying to hammer out a compromise figure.

Last night Health Department sources said the payments to the MacFarlane Trust set up for victims - to which the Government has already given £34 million - were separate from the court case.

But the sources admitted that the Government was making it clear there could be more money if the matter is settled.

Chairman of the Haemophilia Society, The Reverend Alan Tanner, whose son caught the HIV virus from contaminated blood, said: "We wanted an out-of-court settlement because the case might have dragged on into 1992."

See Comment

Tory climbdown Over AIDS victims