

Hugh Taylor

From Liz Woodeson

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Kate Pike – COMMS
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Blood safety documentation – Release of 10 documents from 1975 to Lord Owen and Lord Archer

Purpose

1. This note is to inform you of our intention to release ten documents from his time in office to Lord Owen, copied to Lord Archer.

Timing

2. The attached letters will be sent to Lord Owen and Lord Archer with copies of the ten documents later this week.

Background

3. As you know there is continuing interest in the contamination of blood and blood products during the 1970s and early 80s which resulted in a number of patients being infected with HIV and hepatitis C. The Government has always denied liability but agreed to settle the case brought by haemophilia patients in December 1990. Nevertheless there have been repeated calls for a public inquiry and further compensation. Lord Archer is chairing his own independent inquiry into the issue and the Scottish Government have agreed to hold a public inquiry.
4. Due to the high level of interest, the Department has previously committed to releasing all relevant papers from 1970 – 1985 on the safety of blood and blood products in line with the rules of the FOI Act (eg redacted and with certain categories exempted). Some papers were released in 2006 when we published a report on *'Self sufficiency in blood products in England and Wales: a chronology from 1973 to 1991'* and a further 121 volumes of papers were released in 2007. They were placed on our website and given to Lord Archer.

Lord Owen's papers

5. In addition to the 121 files that we have previously reviewed and released, my staff have now gone through a cabinet containing 43 unregistered files. These were thought to contain copies of papers that had been placed on the registered files, together with a large number of background administrative papers relating to the legal proceedings such as transcripts of the hearings and so on. However buried in these 43 files my staff have found ten documents to and from Lord Owen when he was minister. They appear to be from his private office as some of them include his handwritten comments. They should clearly have been placed on registered files at the time.
6. The ten documents relate to the initiative that Lord Owen launched when he was health minister aimed at making the UK self sufficient in blood products, that up until then were being imported for use in the NHS. They do not alter the story of the self sufficiency initiative. However they show that Lord Owen took a strong personal interest, requesting regular progress reports. The final document shows that Lord Owen was satisfied with the actions taken to launch the initiative. **There is nothing in the documents themselves that will embarrass Lord Owen or the department.**
7. A member of my team has compiled an inventory of all the documents found in these unregistered files and is cross checking them against the thousands of documents already released. There are no further papers to or from Lord Owen. There are a few others that might be considered relevant but they are legal documents so we are discussing with Sol whether or not it would be appropriate to release them. This will take several weeks.

Conclusion

8. Draft letters to Lord Owen and Lord Archer, together with an inventory and copies of the ten documents are attached for your information.

Liz Woodeson
Director of Health Protection