

The Mail on Sunday

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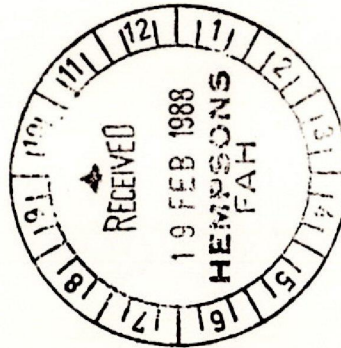
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JA/JEH

18 February, 1988

Your Ref. 1701 0812 0

Messrs. Hempsons,
33 Henrietta Street,
Strand,
London,
WC2E 8NH.



Dear Sirs,

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your letter addressed to the editor, dated February 5, and to confirm that we have been notified that your client Dr. Peter Jones has lodged another complaint with the Press Council.

I trust that you will understand your letter to Mr. Steven will need careful consideration, and either he or I will make a detailed response in the fullness of time.

However, in respect of the Press Council complaint, I have to tell you that we remain surprised that you should construe the leading article of October 18 last as an attack on Dr. Jones himself. As Mr. Steven told you in his letter of November 26, it is our contention that no responsible person would regard that article as implying Dr. Jones could be held responsible for 1,200 haemophiliacs becoming infected with AIDS by contaminated Factor VIII. If the article is read as a whole, it is plainly an attack on the entire medical establishment - not one person.

Similarly, the article dated November 25, 1984, from which you quote selectively in your letter of complaint to the Press Council, needs to read as a whole. Then it will be perceived that it is not a personal attack upon your client's integrity, as you suggest.

We are astonished that you should suggest the Editor is intent upon a personal attack upon Dr. Jones because of a grudge. It is a claim that is not worthy of you nor your client.

The fact is that we believe that AIDS is probably the most serious calamity to effect the human race since the discovery of nuclear energy. It is also true, I am afraid, that contrary to what many people imagine, the authorities have been scandalously slow from the moment the virus was identified to the present day in protecting the public from its effect.

Newspapers therefore have a duty to speak out even if sometimes it is at the expense of the few. There is absolutely no question of this newspaper or its Editor bearing any sort of grudge, but if from the outset the medical profession as a whole had been more vigilant, there would have been no possible reason to ever criticise doctors.

You suggest that the Editor is being irresponsible in pursuing a grudge publicly through the columns of The Mail on Sunday. We would be acting irresponsibly if we failed to sound the alarm bells about this most terrible disease.

I have to add that we at The Mail on Sunday feel in our turn, to be the victims of an unwarranted attack by your client. We are quite baffled as to why this should be so, because this newspaper could, and would, have been such a powerful and willing ally to Dr. Jones in his long and praiseworthy fight for recognition of the need to help the severely affected haemophiliacs.

His personal letters to us in 1983 bewildered us by their very ferocity. They were sarcastic ('How nice of Sue Douglas to concede...'), insulting ('the appalling ineptitude of Sue Douglas...') and objectionable (accusing us of 'blather'). Yet our original article which so upset him should have heartened him, as it demonstrated that we are a newspaper ready to speak out and to campaign vigorously. The sad fact is that here we are five years later and some 1,200 people are still not receiving the sort of help so many of us in this country believe they are due.

This newspaper is dedicated to speaking out on behalf of ordinary people when they have been treated unjustly by authority of any kind. Newspapers are doing their job when they campaign, when they take on bureaucracy, when they do battle with the establishments. We are proud of our achievements on behalf of many many victims within our society - and are equally proud of our stance on campaigning and warning of the dangers of AIDS.

You complain that our leading article was an unwarranted, unfair and misconceived attack. I believe your client's complaint is unwarranted, unfair and misconceived - as was his original one in 1983.

Yours faithfully,

GRO-C

JIM ANDERSON
Managing Editor

cc The Press Council