

Done
Mr Paul Atkinson
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IN CONFIDENTIAL

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To: Dr A Rejman
HC(M)1
DHMTA014
Department of Health

Dr H Nicholas
HPM1
DHMTA026
Department of Health
Tel.

Subject: Hepatitis: Ireland

Thank you for your advice on the phone. Dr Rejman now suggests we:

clear my resulting redraft, now attached - you can ring me to do this,
and

clear the agreed result of that with Dr Metters, which I will do when he
is available after 6pm.

Thanks again.

Data file: P:\DATA\BILATRAL\IRELAND2.
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Briefing for Dr Mackenzie - visit Eric 4/3/94

True Copy for Mr Conran

Outbreak of Hepatitis C in the Republic

On 21 February 1994 the Irish health authorities announced that they intended testing Rhesus negative women who had received intravenous anti-D immunoglobulin following pregnancies in the Irish Republic. Six cases of what now appears to be hepatitis C may have been caused by contaminated anti-D injections, and additional cases have been identified.

The Irish anti-D immunoglobulin is intravenous, unlike anti-D given in the UK, which is intramuscular. This difference is crucial. The Medicines Control Agency has no records suggestive of hepatitis associated with intramuscular anti-D immunoglobulin on the adverse reaction database. With reference to viral transmission intramuscular immunoglobulins have a good safety record.

The Irish Blood Transfusion Board has contacted the PHLS to ask them to screen for hepatitis C any Rhesus negative women who received anti-D after pregnancies in Eire, and to complete a questionnaire. PHLS has been in touch with DH and have been advised that completion of the questionnaire should not be pursued and that testing could have potential problems.

The benefit to a patient of knowing if she is Hepatitis C positive is that she could receive (expensive) interferon treatment which in some cases may help, and the prevention of the low risk of sexual transmission. Disadvantages of knowing a positive result include anxiety and problems in obtaining life insurance.

Line to take with enquiries about the English situation

Mothers can be reassured that the anti-D used in England is safe. It is manufactured to a different process from the Irish product. It has a good safety record and in 30 years we have not had any reports of any infection through the administration of anti-D here. The Medicines Control Agency has no records on the adverse reaction database suggestive of hepatitis associated with intramuscular anti-D immunoglobulin.

Line to take on requests for help tracing Irish women living in England

We have informed our Public Health Laboratory Service laboratories (52 in number) of the problem. [If pressed, M(H) should avoid discussion as far as possible. The Republic is asking for further steps, which we would at present not be keen to take; the latest requests are very recent and need to be examined by medical colleagues. If we wrote to GPs with more information, as the Republic seems to want, the letter could be used by women in litigation against the Irish Government. The more public debate occurs, the more our public line will embarrass the Republic's Government since absolute reassurance must be given to British women. M(H) could say, in private, if essential:-] We will consider thoroughly any requests the Irish Republic makes for further action. However, we all need to appreciate that publicity will make the position worse for the Republic's Government.

Tom
See in particular 2 (1) of this
article.
Done.