

Background

Lord Archer has set up an independent inquiry into the safety of blood and blood products in the 1970s and 1980s. The Department is co-operating fully with the inquiry and has met the team twice, on 25 April and on 19 September. In addition, we have agreed to release copies of official documents from 1970-85, in line with the Freedom of Information Act. We expect to complete this process with a final batch of documents this month.

Mrs. [GRO-A] wrote to Alan Johnson on 9 July and received a reply from the Customer Service Centre on 14 August. The reply was based on information passed in a telephone message from the blood policy team and was factually correct, but capable of an interpretation implying criticism of Lord Archer's inquiry team. No such criticism was intended.

Mrs. [GRO-A] replied to the Department on 22 August requesting details of the Department's dealings with the inquiry team. This was treated as a Freedom of Information request and a reply sent on 17 September. This reply apologised for the earlier reply of 14 August being misleading, and this reply was copied to the inquiry team.

The following correspondence is attached:

- Letter to SoS from Mrs [GRO-A], 9 July (with attached letter to Mrs. [GRO-A] from the Prime Minister, 8 May)
- DH reply to Mrs [GRO-A], 14 August
- Letter to DH from Mrs [GRO-A], 22 August
- DH FOI reply to Mrs [GRO-A], 17 September
- Annex to FOI reply with e-mails between DH and Archer inquiry team
- DH FOI letter to Archer inquiry team, 17 September

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Written Answer

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Col WA103
- WA104.

LORD JENKIN OF RODING (CONSERVATIVE):

Lord Jenkin of Roding to ask Her Majesty's Government why the Department of Health's response to the letter of 14 August from Mrs [GRO-A] of [GRO-A], Suffolk, the widow of a National Health Service patient infected with contaminated National Health Service blood products, informed her that the Independent Public Inquiry into contaminated blood products headed by Lord Archer of Sandwell had ignored the Department's offer of a meeting with the Inquiry; when the Department's head of Blood Policy first saw Mrs [GRO-A] letter; when he informed Lord Archer of Sandwell of his view of the letter; under whose supervision the response was sent; and whether apologies have been offered both to the Inquiry and to Mrs [GRO-A] HL5488

SUGGESTED REPLY

I am very sorry that the reply from ^{the} my Department to Mrs. [GRO-A] to her letter of 9 July was open to misinterpretation. The letter was prepared by the Customer Service Centre, using information supplied by the Department's blood policy team, but did not fully reflect the Department's dealings with the Archer inquiry. No criticism of the Archer inquiry team was intended in the reply of 14 August. An apology for the unfortunate wording of the original reply was sent to Mrs. [GRO-A] on 17 September and this was copied to the inquiry team.

^{Our} My officials are co-operating fully with the Archer inquiry team, and have met with them twice, on 25 April and 19 September. In addition, we are releasing copies of official documents from 1970-1985 to assist their enquiries. It is expected that the final batch of documents will be released by the end of October.