1. CMO

2. Lord Hunt

From: Mike McGovern

Date: 18 October 1999

cc Mark Ferrero
See list

Further Advice from SEAC and CSM on the Blood Supply

Issue

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Group and the Committee for the Safety of Medicines as requested by Secretary of State have reviewed the action taken by the government to safeguard the safety of the blood supply and advise no further action.

Background

In June the US and Canadian regulatory authorities advised their respective blood organisations that all any people who lived in the UK for six months (cumulative) or more between 1980 and 1996 should not donate blood or plasma. This advice aimed at reducing the theoretical risk of passing on vCJD through blood and blood products by excluding those at risk of vCJD through eating beef in the UK during the BSE epidemic. The action was not based on any new information. Several European countries had started discussing the same action.

Because of the implication that UK blood donors might not be a safe source of blood and plasma the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissue for Transplantation (MSBT) discussed the position 3 June. The Committee considered that the only step not taken by the government so far was a formal search for an alternative non UK source of blood. While MSBT was reasonably certain that there was no alternative source it advised that Ministers should consider a formal search to leave no stone unturned. I put the attached minute to Ministers 3 August.

Advice

Secretary of State discussed the issue with CMO and decided to put the position to SEAC and CSM for further advice. SEAC noted that, as a result of its advice and that of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, "licensed blood products are now manufactured using non-UK plasma, and all blood collected in the UK will be leucodepleted from 1 November 1999". In addition the draft public summary which the Committee intends to publish 21 October concludes "that no further steps are necessary to safeguard UK blood supplies". On 14 October CSM also "reviewed its decision of May 1998 in respect of the change of source of blood products away from UK plasma and have advised that no further regulatory action is required".

Action

Ministers are asked to note this advice. Officials will report this back to MSBT.

Dr Mike McGovern

Health Services Directorate

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