

Annex A

ns submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners regarding the proposed National Health Service limited drugs list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are still considering the comments and suggestions submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners and will respond to them as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the representatives of the medical profession appointed to advise him on his limited list proposals have been required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Members of the group will have access to information of considerable financial value to those with an interest in the market for pharmaceutical products. They are people of considerable distinction however and we have complete confidence in their discretion and judgment. They have been encouraged to consult colleagues outside the group about the clinical aspects of the list.

Nevertheless, the legal position is that the members of the Chief Medical Officer's Advisory Group would commit an offence under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 if they made an unauthorised disclosure of information entrusted to them in confidence by Ministers or officials of our Department. Our officials drew their attention to the statutory requirements and they were invited, but not required, to sign an acknowledgement that their attention had been drawn to them and that they understood them.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people living in reception centres have been rehoused by local authorities in the current year; and how this compares with the figures for each year since 1974.

Mr. Whitney: 249 people living in resettlement units (formerly reception centres) were rehoused in local authority rented accommodation in the 12 months up to 20 November 1984. The only other period for which figures are available was April to November 1983 when 192 people were accommodated in this way.

Circular HDC(77)1

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether measures to deal with the effects of chemical and biological weapons will be included in the new circular HDC(77)1.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are a party to the 1972 convention banning biological weapons. In the absence of a chemical weapons ban, active consideration is being given to the detection and warning of danger presented by them and what protective measures can be taken. When the results of this work are available, we shall consider including in the general guidance to health authorities on civil defence planning specific advice on dealing with the effects of chemical weapons.

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to issue the new circular HDC(77)1.

Mr. John Patten: Officials have now been able to consider published and other views on a preliminary draft circular to replace the guidance in HDC(77)1 on civil defence planning in the National Health Service. These views are being taken into account in a further draft which will be issued for general consultation at the earliest possible date.

Furniture Payments (Inquiry)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the Social Security Inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture has now been finalised; and when he proposes to publish the report;

(2) whether the inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture has now reached a stage at which it can tell him how many wrongful refusals of single payments for furniture were found in the course of the inquiry; what action has been taken to correct errors found; and with what results.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 3 December 1984 at column 79. The Social Security Policy Inspectorate's report on its enquiry into single payments for furniture has just been delivered and we shall now be considering what action, if any, needs to be taken in the light of the report including the question of publication.

AIDS

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will bring forward proposals immediately requiring all blood donors to sign a declaration that they are not in a high-risk group for acquired immune deficiency syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We must ensure that all those in the AIDS high risk groups are made aware that they should not donate. Transfusion centres have been told to distribute copies of our revised leaflet "AIDS — Important New Advice for Blood Donors".

Requiring all donors to sign a declaration will not materially increase the safeguards. However transfusion directors are free to adopt this procedure if they wish.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have been monitored for acquired immune deficiency syndrome after acquiring HTLV-III from infected blood in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1984 monitoring was commenced of the three recipients of blood transfusions given by a donor who subsequently had developed AIDS; the transfusions took place in 1983(2) and 1984(1).

This same donor provided plasma from which Factor VIII was manufactured and given in 1984 to 38 haemophiliacs; the HTLV-III antibody status of these patients is being investigated.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that district and regional health authorities possess adequate resources to enable hospitals to adhere fully to the guidelines issued by his Department on acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. We are distributing nearly £500 million additional cash to regional health authorities

in 1985-86. In addition we are expecting health authorities to produce cost improvement programmes yielding in excess of the £100 million identified this year.

Blood Products

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take steps to make immediately available to all haemophile units imported heat-treated factor VIII; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are currently considering a number of abridged applications for product licences for imported heat-treated factor VIII. Even before such licences are granted, heat-treated factor VIII is available for prescription by clinicians on a 'named patient' basis.

Blood Donors

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the design of the leaflet all blood donors are required to read before giving blood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. In recent months we have revised the content of this leaflet to strengthen its message and to extend the categories of persons in AIDS high-risk groups who should not donate blood. This revised leaflet "AIDS"—Important New Advice for Blood Donors" has been printed and issued to regional transfusion centres for their use.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the present statutory sick pay scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Yes. The present statutory sick pay scheme is generally working well and a recent Social Security Policy Inspectorate study, a copy of which I have placed in the Library, indicates that most employees prefer it to the DHSS sickness benefit scheme. The Social Security Bill, which was recently considered by a Standing Committee of this House, provides for the extension of an employer's liability to pay statutory sick pay for his employees from 8 to 28 weeks with effect from 6 April 1986. A consultation paper on the extension was issued by the Department on 21 December 1984. A copy has also been placed in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for the design and distribution to local authorities of a poster advertising housing benefit.

Mr. Whitney: A poster advertising a leaflet "Who Pays Less Rent and Rates?" was distributed in March 1983 to all local authorities. In addition, local authorities receive subsidy for their expenses for operating the housing benefit scheme including the costs for publicity.

Alder Hey and Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the proposal to make two wards at the Alder Hey children's hospital in Liverpool five-day wards.

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there are any plans to alter the bed provision of the Alder Hey children's hospital and the Royal Liverpool children's hospital from seven-day wards to five-day wards.

Mr. John Patten: It is for health authorities to decide on the level of provision needed locally. The hon. Members may therefore care to write to the chairmen of Liverpool health authority about this.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to extend mobility allowance to disabled persons over 64 years of age; and what would be the cost to public funds of doing so.

Mr. Newton: Disabled people can already receive mobility allowance up to age 75 provided that they satisfy the qualifying conditions before age 65 and claim before they reach age 66. We have no present plans to extend these age limits. The estimated cost of abolishing them altogether is £340 million a year.

Private Patient Charges

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether Bloomsbury health authority was one of those where the handling of private patient charges was examined by his Department's auditors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The examination of the handling of private patients charges in Bloomsbury was carried out by the authority's own internal auditors with the assistance of guidance provided by our Department's auditor. He was satisfied with this review and the remedial action taken. The examination formed part of the wider review by our Department's auditors.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of any actions taken by his Department or any health authority in order to encourage patients to come from overseas to receive private or other fee-paying treatment from the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There has been no such action by our Department nor, as far as we are aware, by any health authority.

Overseas Medical Services

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of any involvement by his Department or any health authority in medical services in Egypt, Saudi Arabia or elsewhere overseas.

Mr. John Patten: North-East Thames regional health authority provides administrative advice to the Ministry of Defence in connection with the agreement between the Government and Saudi Arabia under which the Ministry of Defence has appointed contractors to manage the King Khalid National Guard hospital in Jeddah. I am not aware of any other existing contracts.

Doddington Hospital

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what would be the effect on the local family