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HIV transfusion 4 victims launch payment claim

By THOMSON PRENTICE, MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE government faces a host of new claims for swift compensation for health service patients who were infected with the Aids virus by contaminated blood transfusions.

A campaign for the patients, including road accident victims and women who had transfusions during childbirth, is being launched now that £42 million of compensation payments have been agreed for 1,200 HIV-infected haemophiliacs.

About 170 transfusion patients are thought to be infected, but the government denies that they have any right to a similar claim. Lawyers for some of them have formed an action group and will urge William Waldegrave, the health secretary, to give equivalent compensation.

The lawyers have been waiting until the haemophiliacs' cases were resolved. Payments totalling £1.5 million for 34 infected haemophiliac children, and 13 infants whose infected parent or guardian has died, were approved in the High Court on Thursday.

Graham Ross, a Merseyside solicitor, has formed the Transfusion Aids Solution Group with the lawyers for 14

patients in the North. He said: "The government has compensated the haemophiliacs as an act of compassion. I cannot see why that well of compassion should suddenly run dry for transfusion patients whose tragedies are equally real."

Mr Ross said that he had helped to instigate legal action on behalf of the haemophiliacs four years ago. A number of them had since died. "It is a matter of great regret that the government did not see fit to show compassion four years ago," he said. "These are men, women and children who are dying because they were given infected blood. Time is not on their side."

They had been the unlucky few among millions of people who received transfusions during the early and mid-Eighties before blood donations were routinely screened.

The government says the patients are not in the same category as the haemophiliacs because they did not have a life-long, hereditary condition when given contaminated transfusions and they were less likely to have the weakened immune systems resulting from use of blood-clotting agents on haemophiliacs.