

BRIEFING FOR THE PRIME MINISTER: NOVEMBER 1995

NATIONAL BLOOD SERVICE : BACKGROUND

Reorganisation

1. The National Blood Authority (NBA) is a Special Health Authority set up in April 1994 to manage the National Blood Service in England. The NBA's plans for reorganisation move the blood service into a single national service. The aim is a better service and lower costs.

2. The NBA's plans are designed to correct duplication of effort and inconsistency which inevitably resulted from separate management of the Regional Transfusion Centres by individual health authorities. They plan the merger of some of the functions of 5 out of 15 centres - over a period - with 3 administrative zones and a new national computer network. Blood stock holding units will be sited in or near large hospitals to guarantee prompt emergency supplies (a new 2 hours max). Blood collection will be rationalised, but remain accessible to donors.

3. After initial costs (mainly redundancies), long-term efficiency savings (c £10m pa) will be passed on to the NHS in lower blood handling charges to hospitals.

4. Last year the NBA undertook a widespread consultation on their proposals. These attracted a concerted campaign of protest. The NBA evaluated the responses, and established an independent panel to check that the comments received full and objective consideration. In the summer, they put revised proposals - including some changes on the centres to lose bulk processing and testing work affected - to the Department. DH Ministers and NBA representatives had meeting with some of those who had raised concerns. In November, the NBA's medical director met clinicians and then reported to Ministers. Both were satisfied that this showed that no clinical problems had been overlooked.

5. At the same time as announcing acceptance of the reorganisation proposals, we announced a new blood donors charter. For the first time, this sets out what donors can expect from the National Blood Service. The content of the Charter will be reviewed after a year.

Isle of Wight death

6. There has been a death in the Isle of Wight following a blood transfusion. As the results of enquiries will be reported to the coroner it would be inappropriate to comment at this stage. In the view of the NBA, there is no necessity to take any action with regard to the safety of blood supplies.