

PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS UNIT
FINAL MINUTE

1. The following reply has been approved by:

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Date	<i>5 FEBRUARY 1999</i>

2. Reply composed by:

Name	<i>MRS G R SKINNER</i>
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3. The following special points should be noted:

PQ 2608

The Lord Morris of Manchester – To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by the Baroness Hayman on 15 June (WA 18), what are their grounds for saying that infection with hepatitis C carries no social stigma nor any danger of cross infection of partners.

PQ 2609

The Lord Morris of Manchester – To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by the Baroness Hayman on 15 June (WA 18), whether there has been any change of policy between this Government and the previous Government in relation to the relevance of social stigma to the giving of special treatment and financial help to patients with haemophilia infected with hepatitis C through National Health Service treatment and to the dependants of those who have died.

PQ 2610

The Lord Morris of Manchester – To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by the Baroness Hayman on 15 June (WA 18), whether they will consult the Haemophilia Society about remedying the social stigma which can attach to infection with hepatitis C.

Suggested reply

The decision not to introduce a special payment scheme for people infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment was a very difficult one to make. After much careful thought we gave our view that the circumstances were not the same as those for people with haemophilia infected with HIV who received a special payment scheme. In the 1980s there was widespread fear of HIV, infection was generally associated with sexual transmission and was rapidly fatal. We do not think that these circumstances apply to hepatitis C.

We are providing a grant to the Haemophilia Society for their Hepatitis C Youth Information and Support project which offers support on issues such as discrimination and aims to reduce the risk of social exclusion. We will continue to discuss the outcome of the project with the Society.

BACKGROUND

1. Lady Hayman's reply of 15 June referred to SofS's letter of 28 July 1998 to the Haemophilia Society. The letter does not say that there is no social stigma or danger of cross infection in the case of hepatitis C as PQ 2608 suggests; it is a comparison of relative circumstances.
2. Current information indicates that sexual transmission of hepatitis C occurs but that the virus is inefficiently spread in this manner. Prevalence rates for antibodies to hepatitis C of less than 5% have been found in regular sexual partners of infected individuals.
3. The reference to the Haemophilia Society's hepatitis C Youth Information and Support project aims to answer PQ 2610 on talking to the Haemophilia Society on remedying the social stigma caused by hepatitis C.