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John L Marshall Esq MP

Thank you for your letter of 29 April in which you express concern about those people who have been inadvertently infected with Hepatitis C as a result of NHS treatment.

I recognise the suffering experienced by those unfortunate enough to have been infected and I fully understand the reasons why you have so ably argued on their behalf. It is tragic when anyone is harmed through the very treatment designed to help them.

The Government has given the question of compensation very careful consideration, including the Irish scheme. I have great sympathy but I really do think it is better to spend money provided for healthcare, from whatever source, on treating patients than on payments to people who received the best possible treatment available at the time. I am convinced that the best way we can provide practical help is to encourage research, and best treatment for those infected, as well as supporting voluntary groups directly concerned with their care. We shall continue to support these efforts and explore other ways in which we can provide help.

I am unable to comment on the possibility of any commercial company accepting liability through funding a settlement and I do not think it would be appropriate for us to explore that.

You ask whether the National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB) may be able to fund a settlement. The NLCB makes its decisions on applications for lottery funds independently of the Government. I cannot direct the Board to fund a particular project. However, you may be interested to know that the Board is encouraging applications from charities working in the fields of health, disability and care in its current funding round. It is, therefore, possible that haemophiliacs and those suffering from Hepatitis C might be able to benefit from lottery grants, but this would be a matter for the board to decide in response to any applications received.