

Thursday 7 November 2002
Lords Written

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Col WA149-150

Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

Further to the Written Answer by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath on 9 October (*WA 26*), whether the National Health Service policy in England for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C is different from that in Scotland since 2000 in respect of positive appraisal guidance, access to recombinant blood products and addressing the compensation of patients infected with contaminated National Health Service blood products; and, if so, why.

[HL6297]

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: Policy on health matters in Scotland is the responsibility of the devolved administration there. The development of different policies in different parts of the United Kingdom is an intended consequence of devolution and this can lead to different outcomes.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on ribavirin and interferon combination therapy for hepatitis C in October 2000. It expects to issue guidance on pegylated interferons for the treatment of hepatitis C in November 2003. In the meantime, National Health Service bodies should continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where there is no guidance from NICE at the time the technology first becomes available, including assessing available evidence.

The Government are still considering whether to make recombinant clotting factors available to all haemophiliacs in England taking full account of representations made by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia, the Haemophilia Society, the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation and others. We hope to announce our decision before the end of 2002.

We deeply regret that so many people were infected with hepatitis C through blood products. However, this Government and their predecessor have held that compensation is paid to patients only when the National Health Service has been at fault and that an exception to this rule is not justified in the case of people infected with hepatitis C.