FINAL VERSION ,

Briefing

NHS Executive

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PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES ON BLOOD PRODUCTS

The Secretary of State is today making an announcement on two measures concerning blood products. Both will lead to enquiries from patients and professionals; the second also involves prescribing policy.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) is today advising Ministers that, because of the theoretical risk of nvCJD transmission from human to human via blood, they should extend recall action related to nvCJD implicated blood products to include donors who are strongly suspected of having nv/CJD (recall was previously limited to confirmed cases) and to all products made from the same pool. These include medicinal products containing albumin, a blood component used as a stabiliser in a wide range of products, including vaccinations and tablets.

The CSM is also advising a move away from the use of UK sourced albumin for that purpose, and over the next few months will be conducting a review of all other blood products on a case by case basis.

In the light of that advice it has been decided to allow the Bio Products Laboratory (part of the National Blood Service) to import plasma to manufacture a range of blood products, such as Factors VIII and IX (used to treat haemophilia). This will enable the NHS to continue to make its own products without a potentially increasing number of recalls and consequent alarm to patients.

This measure does not mean that UK blood or blood products are unsafe

- there is no firm evidence that nvCJD can be transmitted by blood or blood products. Patients should be reassured that the risk is purely theoretical;
- the expert committees have stressed that the action they advise is precautionary;
- there is no risk to blood donors, and donors' blood is still very much needed for transfusion.

In addition, Mr Dobson said that the NHS Executive would be telling all health authorities to make arrangements to ensure that recombinant Factor VIII is made available to those haemophilia children under 16 who are not currently receiving it, and to new patients. A detailed letter on this, including the funding arrangements, will be sent to HAs and Trusts in a few weeks. This is advance notice of that letter.

The Department of Health does not accept that there is a clinical case for general use of the recombinant product in preference to the plasma version. This decision is in response to the concerns and anxieties expressed by families with haemophiliac children, because of the history of transmission of HIV and hepatitis C through blood products, caused by the knowledge of any risk – however theoretical. This step is intended to reassure them.

Further information from Christine Corrigan on GRO-C or Dr Mike McGovern on GRO-C