SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY COMMITTEE - ADVICE TO MINISTERS

HUMAN BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS

The Committee have recently concluded that the transmissible agent of nvCJD is indistinguishable from that of BSE but distinctly different from any of the forms of classical CJD. Recent research (some unpublished) suggests that the pathogenesis of nvCJD differs from that of classical CJD and the former may have more involvement of lymphoreticular tissues possibly involving circulating lymphocytes. Therefore it is logical to seek to minimise any risk from blood or blood products by reducing the number of lymphocytes present.

SEAC recommends that the Government should consider a precautionary policy of extending the use of leucodepleted blood and blood products as far as is practicable. It will be for the National Blood Authority to devise a strategy to implement such a policy. It will take time to achieve full implementation and SEAC recommends that planning begins soon while the risk assessments suggested below are carried out.

It is not possible at present to estimate accurately the risk of transmitting nvCJD by blood transfusion. The magnitude of the risk will depend, *inter alia*, on the number of blood donors who are incubating nvCJD and this is not known. However, SEAC recommends that risk assessments, making assumptions of various possible incidences of nvCJD, be carried out to inform decisions on any measures which may be necessary to protect recipients.

BEEF

SEAC reviewed the safety of beef in the light of its discussion on human blood and blood products. Transmission experiments in mice have not found infectivity in the spleen, tonsil, lymph nodes or white blood cells of BSE infected cattle.

The Committee conclude, therefore, that no further measures governing beef and beef products for human consumption, are necessary.

[ENDS]