



NATIONAL BLOOD AUTHORITY

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SC/sh

13 June 1994

GRO-A

Gwynedd

GRO-A

Dear Ms GRO-A

John Adey has asked me to reply to your letter about recent press reports of an alleged association between blood and Creutzfeld-Jakob disease.

The research studies undertaken to date show that there is no reason to support that receiving a blood transfusion is a risk factor where CJD is concerned. No link has ever been proved in the Australian cases quoted and other research conducted in the UK has shown that the number of cases of CJD in people who have had a transfusion and those who have not is roughly the same. So people receiving transfusions can be reassured that there is no evidence of CJD being passed on through blood.

As to giving blood, there clearly is no risk as you yourself have pointed out. All the equipment we use is sterile and needles are only used once. Unfortunately the headlines of the two articles in the Sunday People and The Times could have been misinterpreted if people did not read the whole article. We pointed this out at the time and I hope that, if the story should re-emerge, the papers will not use such sensational wording.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

Sue Cunningham

National PR and Donor Services Manager

Blood donor deaths raise dementia fears

By MICHAEL HORSNELL

AN independent inquiry into links between blood donations and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease was demanded yesterday after the disclosure that 22 blood donors have died from the human form of "mad cow disease" since 1990.

Richard Lacey, Professor of Microbiology at Leeds University, and an expert on progressive dementia in humans and cattle, spoke of a pending "nightmare" as the Health Department confirmed that 22 of 156 people who have died

from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease since May 1990 are believed to have given blood at some stage in their lives. David Hinchcliffe, the Labour health spokesman, called for an inquiry after a constituent died of the disease.

The MP for Wakefield said: "I don't want to undermine the NHS, nor the Blood Transfusion Service. I want to establish if there is a possible link between CJD and blood products from people discovered to have been suffering from the disease."

In a parliamentary written

answer last week, Tom Sackville, the health minister, said: "There is no epidemiological evidence of any risk of transmission of CJD through blood or blood products." The Health Department said yesterday that, as a precaution, people with neurological diseases and those with other risk factors, such as recipients of human growth hormones, are excluded from blood donation.

Professor Lacey said that a study in Australia showed that up to six people there had died after receiving transfusions of CJD-infected blood products.

He said: "What deeply concerns me is the reaction of the Department of Health, which says there is no risk. It is manifestly silly to say that. What we don't know is the scale of the risk."

There is no cure for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a form of spongiform encephalopathy, which can take decades for symptoms to emerge, and it is impossible to detect the disease in blood. Mr Hinchcliffe took up the cudgels when his constituent

GRO-A died in

Continued on page 2, col 5

GRO-A

GRO-A died at 60 of suspected CJD

TIMES MONDAY 23.5.94

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December 1992, aged 60, of suspected CJD. She had an operation for a hernia in the early 1960s and a hysterectomy in 1982.

Her husband, GRO-A, 62, a retired gardener from Oldham, said: "She was ill from about 1986. She had what I can only call nervous jerks which would throw her off the stairs or out of a chair. I couldn't cope with it in the end and she had to go into a home. She became a skeleton."

The Department of Health last night rejected the call for an independent inquiry. A spokeswoman said: "We've set up the national CJD surveillance centre and are already

doing a lot of work into CJD." She added: "I don't think anyone could say it is definitely not transmitted through blood because there's still a lot of work to be done."

Dr Robert Will, head of the centre in Edinburgh, said: "I am surprised this has caused such interest. There is a theoretical risk of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease from blood transfusions but current evidence does not suggest it is a risk factor. We know the frequency of people who received blood transfusions prior to developing CJD and there is no difference in frequency between them and those of the same age and sex without CJD."

DEMENTIA FEARS RAISED

PRESS ON

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favour of the routine arming of p

Sue

NATIONAL BLOOD AUTHORITY	
DATE REC'D	27 MAY 1994
ACTION	
BY (NAME)	

GRO-A
Gwynedd
GRO-A

25 May 1994

National Blood Authority
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Hertfordshire
WD1 1QH

Dear Dr. Adey,

I am a "veteran" blood donor, having donated blood 17 times here and in my native country, the United States, and I consider it a vital social duty.

I have become concerned that would-be donors will be put off by what seem to me misleading articles in the British press recently. I enclose one such, which appeared in the Times of 23 May 1994. I normally read the Guardian, in which I have not seen such an article in recent weeks, but an official at my Regional Transfusion Centre (at GRO-A, Gwynedd) told me today that a similar article appeared in the Sunday People a few days ago. Both articles put suspicion on blood donors, while (at least in the case of the Times one) the article carries on to argue that on the contrary it's people who have received blood products rather than have given them who have been at risk. What is going on here? Inflammatory headlines are sure to harm the blood service! It's one thing to say getting a transfusion may put one at risk (e.g. Mrs Walkden, mentioned in the article) but another to assert (as the INITIAL paragraphs of the article do) that it's DONATION that is a causative factor.

I would appreciate a reply on this myself, but would be gladder still to see that you and your staff approach the Times and ask for an apology if they are alleging that donation (with fresh needles) itself puts one at risk from CJD.

Yours sincerely,

GRO-A
