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MS(H) MEETING NOTE

SUBJECT: A.I.D.S.

DATE: WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 1983

PRESENT: MS(H)
Lord Glenarthur

1. MS(H) had two main concerns - to establish the necessity of a leaflet and to agree how the inevitable publicity surrounding it should be handled.
2. Officials felt that Ministers did not have the option of doing nothing. The main objective of the leaflet was to discourage those who were most at risk from AIDS from giving blood and thereby spreading the infection to patients who needed large amounts of blood, principally haemophiliacs. Similar guidance had been issued by the American Blood Transfusion Service and the Council of Europe had recommended that its Member States should put out a warning. Moreover, one of the Regional Transfusion Directors had let slip to the Press that a leaflet was in the offing and if nothing was now done, speculation would be rife.
3. MS(H) accepted the strength of these arguments. He thought the leaflet, as drafted, read well although he would like it to emphasise more strongly how few cases of AIDS there had been in the UK, perhaps by quoting numbers. It should also emphasise unequivocally that donors would not be questioned about sexual matters when giving blood. It was inevitable that the leaflet would attract wide publicity and a carefully drafted Press Notice and full question and answer briefing would be needed. To minimise the scaremongering, the PN should emphasise how relatively few cases of AIDS had been reported and repeat that there was no question of donors being quizzed about their sexual habits. The main objective was to minimise any damage to the transfusion service. The announcement should be made at the same time as the leaflets were released.
4. Lord Glenarthur would be answering an oral PQ about AIDS from Baroness Dudley on 14 July. If she asked about the Blood Transfusion Service, Lord Glenarthur should emphasise that the risk to haemophiliacs was very small.

C July 1983

AFH

cc