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AIDS ANTIBODY TESTS

This afternoon I have had a 3-way telephone discussion with [redacted] and [redacted] at PHLs Colindale. I was able to reiterate what I had said to [redacted] this morning about the importance the Ministers attach to the urgent evaluation of the AIDS antibody test. I explained to them the need for a critical path analysis giving dates for completion of the evaluation together with possible dates for widespread introduction of the test into the National Blood Transfusion Service and, at a later stage, into STD clinics. The importance of having facilities for carrying out confirmatory tests was also emphasised. They assured me that they have allocated this project a top priority and will let us know if there are any difficulties.

With regard to some PHLs Headquarters Laboratories as well as many of the regional laboratories, problems are being encountered with complying with the full spirit of the ACDP containment requirements. As you are aware these requirements have been much criticised by the experts as being far too stringent. [redacted] the Chairman of the ACDP, has assured us that his committee will re-examine the requirements and should be able to issue revised guidelines some time this year.

[redacted] did identify a potential problem, namely the stability or shelflife of some of the commercial kits. The suppliers have indicated that old stock held in warehouses may not be entirely satisfactory.

Work on confirmatory tests is proceeding and there are a number of PHLs Laboratories that already carry out the Weston Blot test for other procedures and there would be no great difficulty in applying the method to the AIDS antibody.

We discussed how the test should be introduced initially into the UK and although the earlier idea was that all transfusion centres should introduce the test at the same time, a more rational approach would be to introduce the test in those regions of the country that have the greatest incidence of AIDS or pre-AIDS subjects and if there are any supply difficulties that regional donors should be selected for carrying out the test on those thought most likely to pose a hazard, eg males rather than females.

[redacted] will contact me if he encounters any difficulties and in the meantime we can anticipate the critical path analysis by next Friday.

31 May 1985

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