

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)

In response to MS(H)'s minute of 22 January 1985 the following submission, draft letter to RHA Chairmen and draft Press Notice has been prepared in collaboration with administrative colleagues. It has been agreed with other Divisions who have an interest.

Involvement of Wellcome

MS(H) wished to know how Wellcome had become involved with the production of a test for antibody to the AIDS virus. Professor Weiss and Dr Tedder (who are not NHS employees), have patented the British isolate and certain aspects of their test method. They asked all likely UK firms in this field if they were interested and Wellcome were the most enthusiastic and the quickest off the mark. Wellcome already being in a somewhat similar field have the expertise to make the tests and to develop further potential with the isolate eg genetically engineered copies and eventually a vaccine.

Wellcome cannot grow the virus in the facility they currently have available. CAMR have the expertise and have made provision to accommodate the volume of cell culture required. Wellcome have thus contracted and will pay CAMR to grow the virus and provide Wellcome with the inactivated material they require to form the basis of the test. Wellcome are not only looking at the home market but for opportunities world wide.

Handling Charge

The income raised from the private sector to cover handling charges for the supply of blood has already been publicly committed by Ministers to provide Regional Health Authorities with revenue to help fund the collection of plasma to achieve self-sufficiency.

AIDS from UK Blood and Blood Products

While as MS(H) suggests the revised leaflet will greatly reduce the risk, we cannot guarantee that all homosexuals will desist from donating blood even with the additional publicity alerting them of the dangers. There may be considerable social pressure on the individual to continue donation. Additionally, heterosexual contacts of bisexual men and drug abusers, and haemophiliacs may be unaware that they have been contacts with infected persons.

As far as is known there are no cases of AIDS in the UK which have arisen following blood transfusion and the three haemophiliac patients with AIDS had received imported Factor VIII. There are three further patients to whom the infection has been transmitted by blood donated in the UK who may yet develop the disease.

Heat Treatment and Screening

The proposed antibody test is not infallible but the best at present we can do for whole blood. Blood products are made from pools of many donations and so the risk of contamination is increased. It is believed that heat treatment will reduce this significant residual risk.

Letter to RHA Chairman and Draft Press Notice (Annex A and Annex B)

It is suggested that MS(H) might wish to send out letters and make the announcement on 1 February 1985 which is the day that the leaflet for blood donors is to be published. (The circular HC(85)3 heralding the publication of the leaflet and advising on its distribution was sent out on 23 January)

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MED SEB
1025A Hannibal House
Ext 3487