

Mr Davies

Copy to: Dr McIntyre  
Dr Bell  
Mr Macpherson  
Mr Robertson

AIDS - TESTING OF BLOOD DONORS

Your minute of 7 February summarises clearly and succinctly the problems associated with the routine testing of all donations of blood for HTLV III.

Testing for HTLV III antibodies is technically different from testing for hepatitis B antigen. In addition, the test is much more expensive as well as being seriously unreliable. Until a test which identifies the virus itself is available matters will remain unsatisfactory.

From a cold objective scientific viewpoint the case for the introduction of a test for HTLV III antibodies in the present state of development and without being properly validated is not clear cut. There is no doubt, however, that there is a lot of public interest and we are liable to be carried along on the rising tide of emotion. We are in a particularly difficult situation in that DHSS Ministers have agreed, however reluctantly, to the introduction of the test. It is most unfortunate that a policy decision on this matter was not made at a UK level, though understandable given the degree of public and media hysteria.

It would be helpful if we could have an office meeting to discuss our advice to Ministers. It is for consideration whether Dr Cash as our Consultant Adviser might also be invited to the office meeting; if he strongly advocated introducing the test despite its limitations the Minister would be open to criticism if he did not agree to the introduction of the test.

In the end I think we shall have to put up a full submission to Ministers, pointing out the issues as summarised in your minute and the distortion of priorities that will arise, though in the end saying we doubt if they have an option. If Dr Cash were to advise unequivocally against the introduction of the test that might be another matter.

If you agree (and others) and, subject to views on the involvement of Dr Cash, I shall arrange a meeting.



G A SCOTT  
8 February 1985