

JDC/EP

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

12th February 1985

Dr John Reid
Chief Medical Officer
Scottish Home & Health Department
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH

Dear Dr Reid

HTLV-III Antibody Testing of all Blood Donations

As Consultant Adviser in Transfusion matters I believe I should draw your attention to a developing situation which is a cause for some considerable concern.

Current evidence would suggest that most of the emerging commercial kits for HTLV-III antibody testing may have a false-positivity rate which, in the context of testing all blood donations, is embarrassingly high. I take the view that the introduction of this practice would be ill advised for the following reasons:-

1. The results will give rise to considerable but unknown and uncontrollable distress and suffering to a significant number (possibly up to 4%) of our donors and, of no less importance, their families.
2. We (the Blood Transfusion Services) have not yet established either appropriate counselling facilities to meet the needs of these donors and their families nor the appropriate technical back-up services required to ascertain false-positivity.
3. I believe, as a consequence of the anticipated activities of the media, the effects of (1) and (2) above are likely to result in a significant reduction in our ordinary blood donation programmes - a small but vital part of the Health Service.

I had anticipated that these matters would be discussed at length and at some leisure by the recently established DHSS Working Groups. However, I believe that the efforts of commercial kit manufacturers, particularly in the United States, has been so great that the demands of the market place will overwhelm these Working Groups - we anticipate full licensing of the US kits within 3 weeks. We have received formal contacts from at least 4 of these companies advising us of this fact and actively canvassing our commitment to buy. There is a madness afoot which I fear the DHSS may be unwilling to face up to and that it (the DHSS) may, by default, distance itself from the moral and practical problems and transfer these to RHAs.

2.

Dr J Reid

12th February 1985

I would strongly advise, sir, that serious and urgent consideration be given to persuading the Minister to make a statement, as soon as possible, which embodies the following:-

1. The NHS is committed to the introduction of HTLV-III antibody testing for all blood donations.
2. This will be actively discouraged until such times as the Government is advised that its introduction is in the best interests of the Transfusion Services in regard to their responsibility for maintaining the supply of blood and blood products to all needy patients.
3. To achieve (1) above active steps will be taken to establish a national (kit) evaluation programme.

I have reason to believe that I have the support of my colleague, Dr H H Gunson (DHSS Adviser on Blood Transfusion) on this matter.

Kindest regards,

Yours sincerely

John D Cash