

# The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE  
HAEMOPHILIA  
SOCIETY

## *A summary of inquiry hearings*

Lord Clarke, health minister from 1982-1985 and Health Secretary from 1988-1990, admitted having a “combative” attitude to giving evidence and often described himself as “exasperated” by what he considered “pointless” questions.

Repeatedly stressing that he had no responsibility for blood products, he said the Department of Health’s ‘line’ that there was “no conclusive proof” that

AIDS was transmitted by blood or blood products throughout 1983 was a “perfectly accurate description of medical opinion” at the time. He said it was not up to ministers to become “amateur doctors” and to indulge in “pet theories” about health. Haemophilia clinicians were making the “key decisions” over treatment, he said, and did not want ministers to interfere. He admitted he’d never

heard of cryoprecipitate and appeared to refer to factor VIII as a pill. He believed, from clinical advice, that some haemophiliacs would die if factor VIII treatment was withdrawn.

As Health Secretary he opposed settling the HIV litigation out-of-court for fear of creating a precedent. When he gave “campaigners” money, he said his experience was that rather than saying ‘thank you’, they just asked for more.

## *Inquiry in focus: AIDS blood donor leaflet*

Last week, the inquiry heard from Dr Diana Walford about delays to a leaflet for blood donors asking high risk groups, such as “promiscuous” gay men not to give blood. One of the reasons for the delays was the involvement of Lord Clarke who was keen to avoid “panic” which he believed could undermine public confidence in the Blood Transfusion Service. The first leaflet was published on 1 September 1983, after delays in July and August, including from his office. He told the inquiry that this had “no effect” on anybody’s health but was corrected by Sir Brian Langstaff who said this was “impossible to say”. There were even more delays to the updated leaflet which explicitly excluded high risk groups from donating blood and was not published until early 1985. One ‘urgent’ memo was held up in Lord Clarke’s office for a month. He told the inquiry that the second leaflet took “too long” and added: “...if I contributed to it, and I can't now all these years [later] explain why...well, there we are, I accept my share of that.” He was unaware of any HIV infections through British made factor VIII, despite a high profile infected batch of Scottish product which was publicised in late 1984.

## Quotes of the week

“We're not going to go on all day like this, are we? I mean, doesn't this inquiry wish to reach a conclusion? I don't know how many years you've been going. Extraordinary.” Lord Clarke

“I think the relevance ultimately, Lord Clarke, is for me to determine...and we may get on a little bit more quickly if we just deal with the questions as they come, and leave the motive or the purpose of asking the questions to counsel.” Sir Brian Langstaff on the ‘relevance’ of questions put to Lord Clarke

“I hope for humanitarian reasons the government will find some way to make an ex gratia settlement to the infected haemophiliacs in relation to this unique tragedy.” Sir Donald Acheson, chief medical officer, 1989

“It's non stop...the haemophilia campaigners have a persistence which dwarfs any other campaigners I know. That's why we're hearing all this almost 40 years later.”

Lord Clarke on the constant demands of “campaigners”

“I can't think that anyone who listened to your evidence will forget it in a hurry.” Sir Brian Langstaff to Lord Clarke