The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER

THE HAEMOPHILIA SOCIETY

A summary of inquiry hearings

This week the inquiry heard a presentation of the knowledge of risk of AIDS in the US pharmaceutical industry. There was also evidence from Christopher Bishop who worked for Armour UK 1969-1993.

AIDS first emerged in the US in 1980. There was "disagreement and tension" between health organisations over how to deal with it. June 1982 was a "pivotal month" for the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which was "reasonably convinced" that haemophiliacs were at high risk of AIDS.

In January 1983—with eight cases of haemophiliacs with AIDS reported—a big inter-agency meeting to discuss action on AIDS ended in stalemate. One representative from the CDC banged his fist on the table, asking how many people had to have AIDS before action was taken.

Core testing and donor screening was discussed but there was no agreement—some companies adopted unilateral testing policies, such as Cutter. Armour stopped using untested donors in UK products in Feb 1986.

In Feb '85 20% of US plasma was tested for hepatitis markers for the German market. Samples that were 2-5 times higher than normal were added to the untested pool.

Inquiry in focus: Armour's HT Factorate

Research by Dr Alfred Prince of the New York Blood Centre for Armour on its heat treated Factorate (freeze dried, heat treated at 60 degrees C for 30 hours) in January 85 found it had a "surprisingly modest" effect. Armour refused him permission to publish this, doubting his methods and claiming it would be "confusing". In July 1985 a patient in Lewisham became the first in the UK to be infected with HIV following treatment with HT Factorate. Christopher Bishop, then Armour UK's Biologicals Division Manager, knew about this but he and his colleagues did not tell clinicians of the potential risks of the product as it was still being investigated by the company. The case was not officially reported for eight months. In January 1986 Dr Peter Jones went public on his concerns about the product, following another case in Holland. Mr Bishop, who stressed that all decisions about the products were made by colleagues in the US, feared Armour UK would lose its place in the market if it could not inspire confidence in the product. When two children in Birmingham tested positive for HIV after treatment with HT Factorate in September 1986 it was withdrawn from the UK.

Quotes of the week

"Although the cause of this outbreak is unknown, the information suggests that a transmissible agent might be involved and concern about transmission through blood and blood products has been raised."

Harry Meyer, director of the FDA's National Center for Drugs and Biologics, issues circular to all manufacturers of plasma fractionation products , July 1982

"4 January 1983 became possibly the most discouraging and frustrating day of the epidemic for CDC staff. Rather than a rational discussion of the data, the meeting quickly became a forum to advance individual agendas and 'turf protection'."

Dr Bruce Evatt of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on a crucial inter-agency meeting on AIDS

"The plea once again, therefore, is a revision of our heat treating process and/or evidence of just one clean virgin patient treated with Armour's heat-treated product who survived NANB contamination."

Christopher Bishop to Armour colleagues, January 1986

"This could be a cleverly connived meeting...to convert all directors to products which...have a better track record...to the elimination of NANB [hepatitis]."

Armour UK's Christopher Bishop on a meeting of UK haemophilia centre directors in March 1986