

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 14 March 2022

The issue of a potential shortage of AHG (anti-haemophilic globulin) was first raised with the chief medical officer in England in 1967 by Dr Rosemary Biggs of the Oxford Haemophilia Centre. She highlighted the need to increase plasma collection and improve facilities to produce more factor concentrate to avoid buying 'costly' commercial

products. This week's presentation on self-sufficiency in England and Wales looked at efforts to boost production at BPL Elstree in 1975 with a £500,000 government grant. But estimates of the amount of factor VIII needed to become self-sufficient varied and did not take account of home treatment. By 1977 the 'policy' aims of self-sufficiency had

been 'achieved', yet commercial concentrates were being used in significant volumes. A damning inspection report at Elstree in 1979 banned any increase in production until improvements were made. A £2.8m 'stop gap' interim plan was implemented until the plant was rebuilt in the early 1980s. There was also a presentation on Dr Richard Lane, BPL director from 1978.

Inquiry focus: Dr Jim Smith and heat-treated products

Dr Jim Smith worked as a senior biochemist at the fractionation plants in Edinburgh, Oxford and Elstree between 1968 and 1992. In February 1983 he wrote a report entitled 'Proposals to develop a hepatitis-safe factor VIII concentrate'. The report said hepatitis B and non-A non-B hepatitis were known to be transmitted by factor VIII and that there was a 'strong presumption' AIDS was also transmitted this way. He put forward heat-treatment as a 'cheap' way of dealing with the issue which, by June '83 had become an A1 priority at BPL Elstree. Three levels of heat treatment were developed, with two proving effective. HT2 - 70°C for 24 hours – would eradicate HIV but not hepatitis. HT3 - 80°C for 72 hours - deactivated HIV and hepatitis but was only possible after more experimentation and was introduced in August 1985, called 8Y. HT2 product was available from late 1984. Heat treated factor IX, called 9A, used the HT3 method but wasn't available until September 1985.

Quotes of the week

'It would seem to me a great pity if we cannot make our own material in this country for lack of the organisation, apparatus and buildings in which to work.'
Dr Rosemary Biggs writes to the chief medical officer about a shortage of factor concentrate treatment in 1967.

'When, as a direct outcome of years of research, lifesaving therapeutic materials suddenly become available to a population of patients previously chronically undertreated, there surely should be some means of assimilating this welcome advance, otherwise it is stupid to undertake the research in the first place.'
Dr Biggs, letter to The Lancet, 1974

'If this were a commercial operation, we would have no hesitation in recommending that manufacture should cease until the facility was upgraded to a minimum acceptable standard. Inspection report of BPL Elstree in 1979

The concept of 'UK self-sufficiency' is an empty one. At the clinical level...an influential group of haemophilia centre directors saw it as limiting a clinician's choice of the best product available for his patient.'
Dr Jim Smith