

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 21 March 2022

The UK's first Blood Product Units were set up during the Second World War, with one in England and the other based at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. In 1965 plans were put forward to build a new Protein Fractionation Centre at Liberton costing £1.7m, which was met by the Treasury. In 1968 it was envisioned that

PFC would process plasma from four English regions. The combined processing capacity of BPL Elstree and PFC was thought to be sufficient to cover the needs of the UK. But although PFC was designed to hold 15 fractionation stations and operate round-the-clock, only five stations were initially installed and, between 1974 - 1984 only three

were in operation. Concerns over pay for shift workers meant PFC did not introduce a 24-hour operation. From the late 70s there was a move away PFC processing plasma from England and, from late 1982, PFC started to supply Northern Ireland. In 1984 it was confirmed that PFC would concentrate on the needs of Scotland and NI, not England and Wales.

Inquiry focus: Dr Peter Foster's AIDS warnings

In June 1983, Dr Peter Foster attended the congress of the World Federation of Hemophilia in Stockholm in his capacity as head of research and development at PFC in Edinburgh. He was present at a meeting about AIDS addressed by Dr Bruce Evatt, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's specialist in haemophilia. Reaction to Dr Evatt's talk was 'mixed', but Dr Foster left the meeting so convinced by what he'd heard that he wrote to a colleague at the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs that night to tell him 'epidemiology strongly suggests a transmissible agent'. His observations resulted in a letter from the trade union to blood products minister, Lord Glenarthur in August 1983, whose reply was 'surprisingly complacent', Dr Foster believed. When haemophilia patients in Edinburgh tested positive for HTLV-III from Scottish-made factor VIII in 1984, Dr Foster said although he was shocked, 'I think we knew it was just a matter of time'.

Quotes of the week

'Patients potentially at risk in the UK (notably haemophiliacs) are evidently concerned and resistance against the use of imported American coagulation factor concentrate is becoming apparent. Equally there is a likelihood that a return to cryoprecipitate as a desirable form of treatment may become irresistible...'

Dr Richard Lane, director of BPL Elstree, on the effects of the emerging risk of AIDS, March 1983

'My own feeling is that with an incubation period of one to three years and the first haemophilia case only 12 months ago, we may only be seeing the first puffs of smoke from the volcano.'

Dr Peter Foster on the emerging AIDS threat, June 1983

'I note the intention to publish a response to the framework study at the same time as the report... you may wish to reflect on whether questioning in the independent setting of the inquiry might not help to inform that response further, and that it might be a pity if those directly affected by its proposals felt that decisions were being made about them behind closed doors without their input.'

Sir Brian Langstaff's letter to Michael Ellis MP on compensation proposals