

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 28 March 2022

The inquiry heard evidence from Dr Robert Perry, who worked as a quality control inspector at the Protein Fractionation Centre in Edinburgh from 1981 and became director in 1985. The other witness was Dr Terry Snape who also worked in quality control at BPL Elstree and the Plasma Fractionation Laboratory in Oxford from 1970

to 2000. Dr Snape was present at a meeting of BPL's senior management about AIDS in April 1983. They discussed what was known about commercial attempts to heat-treat factor VIII in the US as well as the possibility of switching to smaller pool sizes. They decided to adopt a 'wait and see' approach. Dr Perry said self-sufficiency was achieved in

Scotland in late 1983/1984. A factor VIII surplus was used in England and Wales in 1984. From about 1981 until the early 1990s PFC didn't have a manufacturer's licence, relying instead on Crown Immunity. Dr Perry said this was driven by the Scottish Home and Health Department. He and others at PFC thought it was an 'appalling idea'.

Inquiry focus: new Blood Products Laboratory facility

The inquiry was shown a video of the new facilities at the Blood Products Laboratory (BPL) in Elstree which was filmed in the 1980s. Witness Dr Terry Snape said staff were aware that they were creating a 'special factory', designed to replace the old BPL which had been condemned by inspectors in 1979. The video showed the processing of factor VIII, with each batch using 13,000 plasma donations, weighing three tonnes. Individual packs of plasma were quarantined for three months at -40°C so that if any problems were identified with a donor it would not disrupt an entire batch. There was then a controlled thawing with a throughput of 3,000 donations an hour. The original three tonnes of plasma was reduced to 30kg of cryoprecipitate and then 900g of factor VIII which was to be redissolved in a solution. Dr Snape said key improvements at the new facility were a filtered air system, faster and larger machinery which was operated more efficiently thanks to more automation.

Quotes of the week

'The preparation is of human origin and cannot be assumed to be free of hepatitis virus'.
Warning on BPL factor VIII label prior to June 1985

'The overriding view was one of wait and see'.
Meeting of BPL senior management to discuss AIDS in April 1983

'Fractionation is almost like a milking stool with three legs, and the three legs are clotting factors, albumin, and immunoglobulin. Take away any one of those legs and the plasma is being underused and the process is uneconomic. The more you can recover at each stage, the more efficient is the use of the donor's gift of plasma.'
Dr Terry Snape

'One of the prime justifications for self-sufficiency was a belief, which was based on fairly good evidence, that imported products were much higher risk products than those that would be produced from voluntary, non-remunerated blood donors from one's own community.'
Dr Robert Perry

'If I had to summarise what we achieved [at BPL] in just a few words it would be, 'too little, too late'.
Dr Snape