

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 18 July 2022

Lord Michael Forsyth was a minister in the Scottish Office from 1987-92 and as Secretary of State for Scotland from 95-97. He favoured ex gratia payments for everyone infected with HIV through contaminated blood and felt the government's refusal to offer financial support in 1987 was 'blatantly unfair'. When funding for the Macfarlane Trust was announced shortly afterwards,

Lord Forsyth said this was 'cost driven' and didn't look at the 'needs of the individuals'. While he did not accept fault, he said more needed to be done to make 'amends'. The government's attempts to justify not supporting those infected with HIV through blood transfusions were 'indefensible', he said and 'erased' this standard line from his letters. Duncan Macniven was a mid-ranking

civil servant in Scotland's Home and Health Department 1986-90. He and other officials decided not to proceed with an application from Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service in 1986 for funding to do surrogate testing for non-A non-B hepatitis. Medical evidence used in the decision making was later criticised. This issue was never referred to ministers.

Inquiry focus: financial support for hepatitis C

Within 13 days of becoming health secretary in June 2003, Lord John Reid had over-turned the government's 25-year-old policy to oppose financial support for those infected with hepatitis C through contaminated blood products. He arrived 'unsighted' on the issue, but with Scotland moving forward with its own scheme unilaterally this acted as a 'catalyst' and accelerated the decision process. Lord Reid said he did not accept that those who had been infected with hepatitis C should be distinct from those infected with HIV through the same route and felt government had a 'moral responsibility'. On driving this change of policy, Lord Reid said civil servants responded to 'leadership' and wanted to be listened to, but then did their job and got on with implementing what had been decided. He said: 'If the line is wrong, change the line'. Lord Reid adopted the Scottish template for England, with Wales and Northern Ireland invited to join. To his 'everlasting regret' the scheme did not include support for dependents.

Quotes of the week

'Once you get a scheme in there then you could always improve the scheme over time, but get in, get it up and running and bring some immediate relief to those who have been quite frankly deprived of that relief for a long time.'

Lord John Red on setting up the Skipton Fund

'The obligations of the state go beyond legal liability. There is a moral compulsion on the state to protect its people.'

Lord Reid

'What had happened to the haemophiliacs, ...[and] the people who had had blood transfusions and who had also had tissue implants...who had then become infected by HIV... was such a horrendous and exceptional circumstance that a payment should be made.'

Lord Forsyth's view in 1987

He had a determination to achieve the most for the BTS, which was in most ways laudable, and which was a huge advantage for Scotland...but he was very impatient of bureaucracy...and that was energy sapping.

Duncan Macniven on Dr John Cash, head of SNBTS