

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 27 June 2022

Former Prime Minister Sir John Major warned in 1987 that any compensation for haemophiliacs infected with HIV would have to be tightly ringfenced. As Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Chancellor from 1987 to 1990, Sir John said his main concern was not to set a precedent for compensation that other groups would then jump onto. Just weeks after becoming PM in 1990 he had

approved the HIV litigation settlement and told the inquiry it would have been 'absurdly foolish' not to have done so. Sir John caused anger when he said it was 'incredibly bad luck' that people had been infected through contaminated blood products. He later apologised for causing offence. Baroness Virginia Bottomley was health minister from 1989 to 92 and Health Sec

from 92 to 95. She controversially ordered lawyers to push on with contesting the HIV litigation in 1990, deciding that the 'political costs' of continuing the legal battle were outweighed by the risk of creating an 'expensive precedent'. Baroness Bottomley said there was no negligence because the 'best scientific advice' was followed in 'good faith'.

Inquiry focus: Campaign for hepatitis C compensation 1995

In 1995 the Haemophilia Society (THS) launched a campaign for financial support for people infected with hepatitis C. The campaign outlined the impact of hepatitis C on its members' lives and called for a £20m fund for those already suffering and a £10,000 ex gratia payment to anyone infected. Junior health minister at the time, Lord John Horam told the inquiry he wanted to keep an open mind on the issue. As part of this, he asked civil servants to cost a more modest scheme that would compensate only those who'd developed cirrhosis. The next day a note arrived from the Permanent Secretary warning him to take 'extreme caution' over the proposals. The Treasury had also made clear it would not fund any compensation plan. Lord Horam said he was effectively 'warned off' from softening the official policy of no compensation for fear of opening the floodgates to claims. Compensation was rejected in October 1996. Lord Horam said he couldn't justify 'taking resources away from treating patients'.

Quotes of the week

'We could not accept liability if treatment is given according to the science at the time and in good faith, as tragic as it is.'
Baroness Bottomley

'What had happened to them was incredibly bad luck – awful – and it was not something that anybody was unsympathetic to.'
Sir John Major

'Tragic though it is that the very treatment designed to help those patients infected should have caused them harm, there can be no question that they received the best treatment available at the time. Their treatment was essential for their survival.'
Lord John Horam, Oct 1995

'The unfortunate truth is that this is a very slippery slope. Our present stance is uncomfortable, but any movement from it, however slight, is likely to start something we won't be able to stop.'
Graham Hart, Permanent Secretary, February 1996 on compensation for hepatitis C

'To say one death is worthy of compensation but that another is worth nothing, is intellectually barren.'
John Marshall MP, House of Commons debate on compensation for hepatitis C infection, 1996