

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings week of 12 September 2022

Missing documents and record keeping in government was broadly the theme of this week's evidence. In 2004-5 former Health Secretary Lord Jenkin became very concerned about missing documents relating to blood safety which he discovered when trying to get hold of his old ministerial papers. He met Lord Crisp, Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary of Health, and left with the clear impression he'd

been told documents had been deliberately destroyed following the HIV litigation in the early 90s. Lord Crisp disputed this recollection. These missing documents cast doubt on the reliability of the government's review of its papers on self-sufficiency in the 1970s and 80s, published in 2006. Despite public statements from ministers that documents had been destroyed 'in error', the inquiry

heard that it was not known who destroyed the documents and therefore what their motives were. An audit of existing paperwork was finally ordered in 2006, boosted by documents from the Scottish Executive and those unearthed by the Dept of Health and a firm of solicitors. The majority of missing documents have now been traced by the inquiry, we were told.

Inquiry focus: Mail on Sunday 'killer blood' report

On 1 May 1983 the Mail on Sunday published a frontpage story headlined 'Hospitals Using Killer Blood' which reported that two men with haemophilia, one in Cardiff, one in London, were suspected of contracting AIDS through blood products. Journalist Susan Douglas told the inquiry that a friend working in the medical press alerted her to the issue and, posing as a researcher, she got information from a haematologist from Cardiff which confirmed the story. She said her source was 'categorically not' Professor Arthur Bloom. Ms Douglas said although the headline was shocking, she felt this 'intake of breath factor' was what was needed to get the issue addressed. Dr Peter Jones of Newcastle Haemophilia Centre lodged a complaint with the Press Council, accusing Ms Douglas of 'appalling ineptitude' which was upheld and only overturned in 1987. Ms Douglas was critical of a 'conspiracy of silence' from government, clinicians and other bodies, including the Haemophilia Society.

Quotes of the week

'I do not have skeletons in my cupboards just old files. One has come back to haunt me – hepatitis C.'

Anita James, Head of Civil Litigation, Dept of Health 1999

'Looking at this from the point of view of the recipient who is now in end stage liver failure...one can see that these explanations and defences would seem pretty irrelevant compared to the fact that tests could have been carried out and were not.'

Civil servant Roger Schofield on the government's defence of hepatitis C litigation in 1995

'I find it difficult to believe this was an appropriate cull.'

Former Health Secretary Patrick Jenkin in 2005 on discovering files dealing with contaminated blood had been destroyed.

'The sensationalism idea of [the 'killer blood headline] I came to view as something that we had to do to make a difference, to make people wake up to this very real risk and I felt more and more certain...that the establishment was beginning to try to stop me.'

Susan Douglas, Mail on Sunday journalist