

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 19 September 2022

The inquiry has continued to focus on decision-making in government. A presentation on the issue from the Scottish perspective made clear that consultation with the Westminster government was often quite limited before devolution. The Scottish Office were upset to learn that a settlement had been reached over the HIV litigation in 1990 without any prior discussion. This caused significant

problems as Scotland's litigants had a separate case which was being dealt with under Scottish law. Scottish lawyers didn't have access to the settlement details and were initially unable to explain the deal to their clients. Scottish officials appeared to have been told about the first cases of AIDS from Scottish-made factor VIII in November 1984 – a month before it was made public.

Civil servant John Canavan was part of the Department of Health's secretariat for the Advisory Committee on the Virological Safety of Blood 1989-94. Committee papers showed discussions about blood screening tests for hepatitis C. Although agreed in principle in mid-1990, delays over pilot studies and funding meant it was not introduced UK-wide until September 1991.

Quotes of the week

'I think the public should be reassured - I do not think people in Scotland have anything to worry about, whether they are getting blood transfusions or other treatment with blood products.'
Professor Ronald Girdwood, chair of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Association, quoted in Scottish media, November 1984

The Committee's view is that with the existence of the current test procedures, to continue a policy of not screening poses an unacceptable risk to the health of recipients of blood and plasma.'
Dr Metters, chair of the Advisory Committee on the Virological Safety of Blood, on hepatitis C testing, December 1990

'None of the recommendations for action demonstrated any movement on the part of officials to find positive responses where we could to the Archer recommendations.'
Baroness Primarolo on her disappointment at DoH officials' proposals to respond to the Archer Inquiry recommendations in March 2009

'On the whole the report looks like something we wouldn't want to spend a lot of time on.'
Liz Woodeson, DoH civil servant, on the Archer Report, Feb 2009

Inquiry focus: Government response to Archer Report 2009

When the independent Archer Inquiry made its final report in February 2009 - a year later than anticipated - Department of Health officials appeared unprepared. An initial summary of Archer's recommendations and a background briefing from civil servant Rowena Jecock was deemed inadequate by Public Health Minister Dawn Primarolo who instructed officials to urgently get to work on finding ways to respond as positively as possible. Unknown to her, Liz Woodeson, a civil servant in her team had already cautioned against spending too much time on the report and saw the response as a chance to put the government's case while conceding very little. Baroness Primarolo told the inquiry she was frustrated that officials spent far more time pointing out difficulties than solutions and acknowledged there was a problem with 'institutional inertia'. In April 2009 the government announced some extra funding for support schemes but excluded the Skipton Fund, prompting a backlash of criticism.