Tests on haemophiliacs positive

NHS blood carries killer AIDS virus

BRITAIN'S Health Service blood supply has become contaminated with the virus thought to cause the killer disease AIDS.

New evidence confirms the worst fears that the battle to prevent it infiltrating blood used for transfusions and to make blood products has failed. The virus likely to cause AIDS has been detected in patients treated with blood products in both England and Scotland.

The victims have been patients receiving blood transfusions and haemophiliacs who are treated regularly with a blood product called Factor VIII.

In Britain, there are 100 reported transfusion cases, but these haemophiliacs have undoubtedly been infected.

Some 60 per cent of Britain's Factor VIII is imported from the United States, and this was thought most likely to be responsible for passing on the virus. But it is now clear that the blood collecting service and supply in Britain is itself contaminated.

Tests on haemophiliacs at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary have revealed that several patients have been exposed to the virus and it is possible they may develop the disease.

The crucial element in these tests was that the patients had been treated not with Factor VIII but with Factor VIII derived from the NHS in Scotland. An additional concern is that all Northern Ireland's supplies of Factor VIII are produced in Edinburgh by the Scottish Prothrombin Fractionation Centre.

It is now known that two batches of Factor VIII produced at the Government's blood products laboratory in Kildare, Ireland, are contaminated.

In this country Factor VIII is made from plasma taken from whole blood given by volunteers. Doctors working in haemophilia centres consider that the NHS blood supply has been compromised and it is no longer safe for their patients.

Yesterday, the Haemophilia Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital said it was issuing a notice recommending to all medical units in Britain that patients should no longer be treated with the NHS product.

Dr. Peter Jones, director of the haemophilia unit at Newcastle Royal Infirmary, said: "There is no question of the blood supply now being safe to use for haemophiliacs in Britain."

This is the first time the NHS has had to use Factor VIII manufactured by the British Diaper Co. under the National Blood Transfusion Service, an undertaking made available only to avoid the present situation.

Dr. Christopher Ludlam, a consultant haematologist and director of the haemophilia centre at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, admitted yesterday that antibodies to the suspected AIDS virus have been found recently in 18 of the 200 patients treated with Factor VIII from the Scottish NHS.

He told the Yorkshire Post: "We picked up the HTLV-3 antibody as part of a research project. We had hoped they would not be there. What this means is that these patients have been exposed to the virus."

"They knew it was not from an American blood product — because all these patients have been treated only with Scottish Factor VIII. They may or may not still have the virus — we cannot tell.

"This autopsy of evidence suggests that the virus has been responsible for a number of patients who have been treated with Factor VIII in Scotland. This meant that the virus had been transmitted, and it is possible they may develop the disease."

Dr. Jones said: "We are not saying the virus has always been a danger, but that it is probably present now."

"We are in a position where it would appear that although AIDS may be spread by HTLV-3 only a small percentage of people who become infected actually develop the disease. "We do not know why."

Partly as a result of this discovery, all Factor VIII in Scotland is being held treated to kill the virus. This does not mean that the blood products are guaranteed to be safe, but it is hoped that the AIDS virus will stop growing. Which blood cannot be heat treated to make it safe because it just congeals."

News of the positive testing was passed on to haemophiliacs from Edinburgh and Glasgow at a meeting last month. They were told collectively that..."