Hospital reveals new blood treatment

DOCTORS ANNOUNCED today they have started using genetically engineered blood clotting agents, which carry no risk of AIDS or hepatitis, to treat haemophiliacs.

The advance offers hope to thousands of haemophiliacs in Britain and should lead to many more patients being treated worldwide.

"Patients will not need to inject so much of the substance, so it is quicker and easier to administer."

The medical team at London’s Royal Free Hospital said Mr Victor Budgen (35) of Mill Hill, North-west London, was the first patient in Britain to be given the synthetic Factor VIII clotting agent.

He had responded excellently to his first injection last week and would be monitored closely over the next six months to demonstrate the safety of the treatment. Other patients would then start to receive similar treatment at the hospital’s haemophilia centre.

Dr Peter Kernoff, director of the centre, said: "This is a major milestone in a long story involving a huge investment in money and scientific effort."

"Because the basic work was done at the Royal Free, the hospital and medical school stand to benefit from substantial royalty payments once the material is in full-scale production."

Dr Kernoff forecast that it might be possible to make designer Factor VIII better than the body’s own system.

"For example, synthetic products might be made which would last longer in the body than natural Factor VIII, or which might be taken by mouth instead of having to be injected."

"Not only that but the knowledge gained about the biology of Factor VIII brings the possibility of a permanent cure for haemophiliacs by gene therapy very much closer."

The medical team said that because existing supplies of Factor VIII were derived from human blood only limited supplies were available and there was a potential risk of AIDS or hepatitis infection.

In the UK 113 haemophiliacs have developed AIDS and many more are infected with the virus because of past exposure to contaminated blood products.