

THE BIRCHGROVE

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WHAT PRICE BLOOD?...

ISSUE NO 5

by Mike O' Driscoll

The National Blood Authority (NBA) – the unelected quango responsible for running The National Blood Service – intends to replace altruism with profit, according to Melanie Phillips, in the *Observer* on the 20th of November 1994.

In a scathing article that rightly condemns the motive of the NBA, Ms Phillips reveals how management consultants, Bain & Co., were commissioned by the Authority – at a cost to the health service of £600,000 to provide a report on transforming the blood products laboratory into a profit-making enterprise.

Among the proposals, are plans to close five out of the fifteen blood testing and processing centres in England and Wales, and to establish what are called blood stockholding centres. The NBA would also like to see fewer uneconomic blood donor sessions around the country, replacing them with larger sessions, which would no doubt increase the productivity and economic performance. And where is the evidence for the alleged inefficiency of the testing and processing centres?

Not in the Bain report, according to Ms Phillips, the British Blood service does not suffer a cash crisis, and apart from satisfying the vast majority of doctors, donors and recipients, it is also the most cost effective blood supply system in the world.

The refusal of the NBA to say where these stockholding centres are to be located, what supplies they will hold and how these supplies will be stored, shows the ignorance and shortsightedness of the quango.

Many doctors have voiced fears that patients lives will be put at risk, if as indicated, the new centres are located up to two hours from some hospitals. And what of the donors? Since the smaller donor sessions supply 30% of blood, will the NBA guarantee to increase the larger sessions by 30%? As Ms Phillips acutely observes, "in the name of the common good of economic efficiency, the NBA will take an axe to the bedrock value of the service, that priceless willingness by people to serve the common good." The report reveals enthusiasm for NHS reforms and how these reforms will lead to a more commercial environment for the service.

The implications are clear. Blood is to become a viable commercial commodity. If donors cannot be relied upon to donate altruistically at the new, larger sessions, then it follows that you pay them for their blood. And of course, you then have to recoup that cost — make a little profit. The National Blood Service becomes a "nice little earner", in which no doubt we will all have shares.

Except that it's not all right. There's a bitter irony in the fact. Those of us who are infected with HIV became so due to the use of contaminated Factor 8. It was purchased from the sort of commercially viable blood service that the NBA aspires to. With shareholders seeking high dividends, the cost of blood is bound to rise and concomitantly, so are it's derivatives. What price then High Purity Factor 8? Or will the NBA guarantee sufficient quantities of Pure blood products to the Health Service at affordable prices?

Frustration and anger was again forcefully expressed by people who are affected with haemophilia and HIV, at the Birchgrove Conference. Registrants believe that it is the role of the Macfarlane Trust to provide adequately for those who are affected.

The conference believes that the Trust is failing to respond to many of the existing identified needs. The Macfarlane Trust has failed to tackle or examine the wider range of problems and concerns which face those people who are affected by haemophilia and HIV.

We are therefore sending an open letter to the Chairman of the Trust and we have printed a copy of it in the centre of this newsletter. We know that many registrants believe that the Trust is failing in its duty of administering the funds allocated by the government. We believe that significant numbers of people are looking to the Macfarlane Trust to clarify and justify its current position.

THE BIRCHGROVE WOODLAND PROJECT...

A seed is planted and it struggles to become a sapling, it sends out searching roots with which it clings tenaciously to the earth, and unfolds spreading branches with which it reaches to the heavens.

From the sapling, a vigorous and healthy tree can grow to become a thing of beauty and strength. A tree able to withstand the fiercest winds and storms that nature can hurl at it. The tree has to contend with many challenges throughout its life, and the

same can be true for us. We are strong and determined people who refuse to let haemophilia or HIV distort our lives. We seek to face our problems in a positive and constructive way, we have therefore, chosen a grove of trees as the symbol of our struggle to overcome the challenges of haemophilia and HIV.

This woodland grove will be a permanent and living reminder of the courage and determination of all those who have faced these problems.

Please help us create this living testament to those who have lived and are living with HIV, please sponsor a tree at a cost of £25.00. This donation will help pay for the grove to be planted and permanently maintained. A sponsorship application form is attached to the centre of this newsletter. On receipt of your donation, we will send you a Certificate of Sponsorship, which if required can record an individual's name.