

09.03.2015

Dear Colleague

Thank you for all the support you have given to those who have suffered as a result of the contaminated blood scandal.

Following the debate on the 15th January, I am writing to bring you upto date with activity since then, and ask for your help once more.

The debate raised a great deal of interest, both from the affected community itself and amongst MPs, some of whom had not previously encountered the issue. Colleagues who have been engaged for some years are deeply grateful for the assistance and support being given.

Following the debate, and the announcement that the Penrose Inquiry will report on the 25th March, Diana Johnson, Jenny Willott, Jason McCartney and myself wrote to the Prime Minister. We recognised that the Penrose Report is likely to be far reaching, with implications for the United Kingdom as a whole, and not just the devolved administration in Scotland, and cannot be responded to in detail immediately.

However we do not want the affected community to fear that the end of this Parliament means that this issue is to be lost or forgotten. We believe that enough is already known for the Government to be able to make an interim response, and a commitment for the future. This is an extract from our letter:-

In order to set a response to Penrose in the context of a Government and Parliament deeply concerned about the circumstances which have given rise to so much upset and pain over the years, and not least because the crucial issue of finance will be an element which must require detailed consideration and some time, may we suggest that very soon after the Penrose announcement - whilst Parliament is still sitting if possible - the Government should come forward with a response and some proposals relating to those matters upon which Penrose may not pronounce.

These might include:

- a proposal for some form of process to enable questions to be asked directly of the Department of Health about what happened and why in the past, as this concern has not gone away, according to the debate and surveys. As the late Paul Goggins suggested, this need not be a formal public inquiry process;*
- a full government review of the support mechanisms as advocated in the APPG Report. We think the term 'review' should be wide, and should include the possibility of collapsing some of the charities which are most criticised. At the very least, we should ensure the charities are put on a stable long-term*

financial footing and that they are reformed so that they act as advocates for, rather than adversaries to, their beneficiaries. In establishing the appropriate payments, this review should also have account of the additional costs of living with HIV and/or Hepatitis C, and should be sufficient to lift people well above a poverty line which has been adjusted for the specific needs of those affected.

- an acknowledgement that the distinctions between both (a) Stage one and Stage two in Hepatitis C cases; and (b) the support widows/widowers of now-deceased Hepatitis C infectees, set against that provided to those of HIV infectees, are proving inappropriate and should be reviewed;*
- that further recognition needs to be given to the problems of dependants, and of the unexpected length of life issues for survivors*
- access to most modern medical treatments*
- consideration to greater 'passporting' to benefits*

We also suggest that each party makes a manifesto commitment in some form which indicates that this is not forgotten, and that there will be best endeavours to reach a conclusion as soon as possible within the next Parliament.

We would be very grateful therefore if, between now and March 25th, you would contact the Government through Minister Jane Ellison MP, and/or Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt MP to press the points above, and to press our own parties for the commitment to the future which might be made in a response to Penrose and be made in a form suitable for a manifesto commitment in the impending general election.

I believe the Government will want to make an early response, but I hope that if you agree with the points made above, that Parliament's determination on this issue will ensure that it does, and that the respective front benches will also be encouraged to make the commitment we all wish to see.

With the thanks of all of us engaged on this issue,

Yours ever

Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP