



Tainted
Gary is one of
an estimated 116
Scottish people
who were infected

Blood simple

BY FARIHA KARIM

Scottish people infected with HIV during one of Britain's worst medical disasters fear their chance to hold health officials to account is slipping from their grasp.

More than 100 victims who were given infected blood during transplants 20 years ago have been fighting for answers.

However, with a landmark public inquiry now given the go-ahead, they were devastated to learn the investigation will only address those people infected with Hepatitis C and that HIV sufferers have been put to the back of the queue - with Scottish Government officials telling them they will not decide whether or not to take up their case until the result of the first investigation is in.

Gary Kelly, 44, was one of thousands infected with HIV in the 1980s after he was given contaminated blood during a bone marrow transplant operation for leukaemia, and diagnosed in 1986 aged 23. He says: "I went back to the clinic, a few months after the operation, and they just said, 'you're HIV positive'. I was shocked."

Twenty-two years later, he has failed to win an apology from the health officials responsible and they refuse to answer questions in a public inquiry. But now it's emerged his only chance of getting an answer, through a newly announced Scottish Government public inquiry into the 'tainted blood' scandal, is

something he will have to fight for. "We want people to be held accountable for what they've done. Kids have grown up without a mother and a father because the state has killed them. They've ruined our lives. We want an apology and proper compensation."

The medical disaster emerged during the late 1970s and early '80s when the department of health went against the advice of the World Health Organisation and imported blood for transfusions from the US.

'Factor 8' contaminated blood, which wasn't treated properly, was bought from paid Arkansas prisoners in a deal signed off by the then governor Bill Clinton. Nearly 5,000 British people were infected with Hepatitis C as a result, with 1,200 of those also infected with HIV.

Latest figures suggest 1,757 have died and many more are terminally ill. But despite health bosses' claims they acted in good faith, recently revealed documents show the government's advisers, the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, knew patients were at risk of contracting HIV as early as 1983 - but ruled against a ban because of fears it would cause a shortage of supply.

Other countries that received the blood, namely Japan and southern Ireland, have apologised for the scandal and have given out compensation payments. Campaigners last month won a breakthrough when the Scottish

Government said it would hold a public inquiry into the scandal. Their decision to hold the inquiry followed a judge's ruling that overturned a 2006 refusal to investigate the deaths of two Scots from Hepatitis C.

The decision also follows an independent inquiry being held in London by Lord Archer of Sandwell, due to finish in weeks. But it has since been revealed Holyrood has only given a pledge to investigate Hepatitis C and are refusing to be drawn on whether the inquiry

'The state has killed mothers and fathers'

GARY KELLY, infected with HIV

should also examine patients infected with HIV. The fear is the 116-odd Scots like Gary who were infected with HIV through contaminated blood products will never get their chance for justice.

"The Scottish Government say they are waiting for the Archer Inquiry to finish before they decide whether they're going to look at just Hep C or if they're going to expand it," says Gary. "But it's the same paperwork, it's the same people who made the decisions. We still haven't been given an answer. We are the

forgotten victims of the scandal. If there's a judicial inquiry, it should be into all contaminated blood products." It's also vital to hold a full public inquiry into all illnesses arising through 'tainted blood' because it could pave the way for compensation payments. Although people infected with HIV and Hepatitis C were given ex-gratia payments in the early '90s following public outcry, Gary spent his £43,500 - thinking he only had five years left to live.

Now his health is failing badly and being an HIV patient is expensive. Currently on a cocktail of 24 different types of drugs to treat his condition, many with debilitating side effects, last year he suffered four heart attacks and is due to go into hospital for a triple heart bypass in April.

He and the Scottish Haemophilia Group, also campaigning for the Scottish inquiry to include HIV, have joined forces. Their campaign is backed by Tainted Blood - a pressure group made up of victims of the scandal. Hayden Lewis, of the group, says: "Unless they're totally inclusive for all infections and all recipients, we're never really going to get to the bottom of it and find some closure."

In the last letter Gary received from a civil servant, he was told Scottish Ministers "are considering whether the scope of the inquiry should extend to HIV infection. An announcement will be made in due course". The Scottish Government said the inquiry's "parameters" were still being "determined". ●