

EXTRACT FROM -
THE SCOTSMAN
12 DECEMBER 1990

Haemophiliac victims of AIDS offered £51m deal

By Joanne Robertson, Parliamentary Correspondent

HAEMOPHILIACS infected with the AIDS virus as a result of using contaminated blood products were offered a £51 million compensation deal by the Government yesterday.

The Prime Minister, John Major, signalled a different approach to the haemophiliacs' campaign for further compensation awards on top of the £34 million already paid out, by announcing that an out-of-court agreement had been accepted in principle by the Government.

The announcement was seen as a breakthrough on the issue for the Government which, under Mrs Thatcher's leadership, had insisted that compensation would remain a matter for the courts.

The Health Secretary, William Waldegrave, argued that the proposal, which he claimed could lead to one of the most generous settlements for haemophiliac victims in the world, had not occurred as the result of a U-turn.

However, he did acknowledge that the involvement of a number of fresh minds had helped bring about the agreement which has been sanctioned by Mr Major, and the Treasury Chief Secretary, David Mellor.

Mr Waldegrave stressed that £42 million will be allocated to haemophiliac victims by the MacFarlane Trust, set up by the Government, on condition that no future litigation is embarked on and without the Government having to admit liability.

The Haemophilia Society general secretary, David Waters, said: "John Major and William Waldegrave are to be applauded for addressing the problem so promptly — it is unfortunate the settlement has been so low."

The steering committee of solicitors representing the victims suggested the deal after their earlier proposals for a more generous settlement were rejected.

In addition, the Government will settle out of court a number of cases where negligence might have been proved.

That will add several million pounds more to the total settlement, and when legal costs are included, will make the package worth

between £47 million and £51 million.

The 1,200 haemophiliacs in the UK who have contracted HIV will be able to claim payments from the MacFarlane Trust which will compensate victims by taking into account their circumstances and dependants. Already 216 haemophiliacs have developed AIDS and 148 deaths have been reported.

Victims will also benefit from the Government's agreement to take steps to ensure that social security payments will not be reduced as a result of any cash payment.

The trust was first awarded £10 million by the Government in 1987, followed by £24 million in 1989.

The trust has issued guidelines for the allocation of the £42 million, although final payments will vary according to individual needs. It is expected to be based on the 175 children affected receiving about £21,500 each; the 533 single men £23,500; the 214 married men £32,000; the 293 married men with children £60,500; the 25 infected spouses and partners £23,500 and the 150 widows, widowers and bereaved partners £2,000.

The Scottish Office plans to consult representatives of the 77 Scottish haemophiliacs who have contracted the virus, of whom 26 have begun litigation against the Government.

The Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, welcoming the announcement, said: "These proposals have yet to be approved formally by individual plaintiffs or their representatives. Arrangements are being made to consult with representatives of Scottish haemophiliacs with HIV."

Labour's Scottish health spokesman, Sam Galbraith also welcomed the move but added: "It is a tragedy that this has come too late for those who have already died waiting for action from this callous Government."

Another seven people in Scotland died from AIDS last month, bringing the total so far to 90. Latest figures also showed 10 new cases in November, meaning 191 people have now developed the full-blown syndrome.

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