

From the Office of Sir Nigel Crisp KCB
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Thank you for your letter of 25 October requesting a meeting to discuss record management in the Department of Health. I was pleased to hear that you have been able to identify some papers to help you with your enquiries.

When we met in April I explained that certain papers dating back to the 1970's and 1980's had been destroyed. I appreciate that you would like to discuss this further, however I thought it would be helpful to write to you about this issue instead. Naturally, I am concerned that important files from this period no longer exist. Although these events took place a long time ago, my officials have undertaken to explore why important documents were destroyed.

As previously mentioned, it is our understanding that during the HIV litigation in the 1990's many papers from that period were recalled for the purpose of the litigation. We understand that papers were not adequately archived and were subsequently destroyed in error in the early 1990's.

Officials have also established that a number of files were marked for destruction in the 1990's. Clearly, this should not have happened. When the discovery was made that files had been destroyed, an internal review was undertaken by officials. I understand that a decision, most probably made by an inexperienced member of staff, was responsible for the destruction of a number of files. The decision to mark the files for destruction was not a deliberate attempt to destroy documentation. It is very unfortunate that the staff member at the time was not fully aware of the significance of the files and the possibility of future litigation.

I am aware that this explanation may disappoint some haemophilia lobby groups and I am very sorry that the Department no longer holds many papers going back to the 1970's and 1980's.

All Departmental staff are informed about the principles of good record keeping. In particular the policies and procedures for the management, review and disposal of files and documents are designed to meet the Department's own administrative needs and the Public Records Act. A key development in the Department over the past few years has been the introduction of an electronic records system to help keep track of e-mail and a range of other electronic records.

Yours sincerely

NIGEL CRISP