30 Years Later, U.K. to Investigate Its National Blood Scandal

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The government of the United Kingdom has announced that it will be making an official inquiry into one of the country's most notorious health scandals: a disaster involving contaminated blood that left nearly 7,500 people infected with HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) in the 1970s and '80s, the BBC reports.

The blood scandal, which led to at least 2,400 deaths, originated when thousands of patients enrolled in the U.K.'s National Health Service were given imported blood products infected with the viruses. Many were people receiving treatment for hemophilia, an inherited bleeding disorder that requires regular treatment with a clotting agent made from donated blood.

According to a recent parliamentary report on the topic, health officials discovered too late that some of the plasma used to make this clotting agent came from donors who were living with HIV and viral hepatitis, including prison inmates in the United States who sold their blood. This occurred more than 30 years ago, when countries were not yet screening their blood supplies for HIV or hepatitis C.

Still, many of those affected and their families believe they were not warned of the risks involved in receiving donated blood, and that the government tried to cover up the scandal. A spokesman for U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May said the inquiry would aim to more thoroughly investigate the causes of the "appalling injustice" and that families of those who died would be consulted about what form the investigation should take.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn also said the inquiry should have the potential to trigger prosecutions. If the government investigation finds culpability, individuals may also seek compensation for their illness through the U.K. courts.

In the United States, a similar issue left nearly 50 percent of people living with hemophilia infected with HIV and 90 percent with hepatitis C by the time contaminated products were pulled from the market in 1985. To learn more about the United States' crisis, click here.

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