Damning Report Details U.K. Infected Blood Scandal Involving HIV, Hepatitis

Over 3,000 died, mostly of HIV and hepatitis, because of contaminated blood and blood products from the U.K.'s National Health Service.

May 23, 2024 By Trent Straube

It is the United Kingdom's worst public health care treatment disaster and a catastrophic moral failure: Over 3,000 people have died and nearly 30,000 patients contracted HIV and/or hepatitis B and C through contaminated blood and blood products between the 1970s and early 1990s, reveals an inquiry and public report released this week by the government.

During the decades in question, patients received contaminated blood through the National Health Service (NHS), the United Kingdom's publicly funded health care system. This includes people who needed blood transfusions during surgeries and childbirth and as a result of accidents as well as people with blood disorders, such as hemophilia, who needed donated blood products, reports The Guardian.

"Today's report shows a decades-long moral failure at the heart of our national life," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told the House of Commons when the inquiry on the contaminated blood scandal was released, reports the BBC. "I want to make a wholehearted and unequivocal apology."

Sunak and other U.K. officials also noted that victims, including those already deceased, will be compensated through a multibillion-dollar program; each victim could receive up to £2.5 million (about $3.17 million).

The Report makes 12 recommendations including a call for national recognition of this treatment disaster, compensation, and a change of culture and practice in the NHS and the Civil Service. Read the report here: https://t.co/lhr9SGYlFd

— Infected Blood Inquiry (@bloodinquiry) May 20, 2024

The report found that health officials had exposed patients to unacceptable risks—for example, by importing potentially unsafe blood—and then covered up their actions and refused to reform their guidelines.

The public report's introductory summary reads in part:

> "Patients have received blood or blood products from the NHS since it began in 1948. Many of those treated with them, particularly between 1970 and 1998, died or suffered miserably, and many continue to suffer. This was not as a direct result of the underlying condition or illness that took them to the NHS in the first place, but as a result of the treatment itself.
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> "This would be catastrophic enough if they were the only victims. But the treatment has caused others to suffer too—partners, family, children, friends— some by being themselves infected, some by having to watch loved ones die, some by having to give their lives to caring; and almost every one of them, infected and affected, suffering in almost every aspect of their lives.
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> "I have to report a catalogue of failures which caused this to happen. Each on its own is serious. Taken together they are a calamity. Lord Winston famously called these events "the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS". I have to report that it could largely, though not entirely, have been avoided. And I have to report that it should have been.
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> "I have also to report systemic, collective and individual failures to deal ethically, appropriately, and quickly, with the risk of infections being transmitted in blood, with the infections when the risk materialised, and with the consequences for thousands of families.…
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> "The scale of what happened is horrifying."

One of the Report's recommendations is that anyone who had a blood transfusion prior to 1996 should be offered a test for Hepatitis C.

The Inquiry wishes to highlight that postal testing is available in England and Wales from https://t.co/9TBUK21SkL and https://t.co/eedjOtMLfv.

— Infected Blood Inquiry (@bloodinquiry) May 21, 2024

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. When untreated, it can lead to scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), liver cancer, the need for a liver transplant and death. Hepatitis can be caused by several factors, including toxins, excess alcohol use, autoimmune diseases, fat in the liver and viruses, including the three most common ones: hepatitis A, B and C. According to "Hepatitis C Transmission and Risk," part of Hep's Basics of Hepatitis, hep C is most easily spread through:

- Sharing needles and other equipment (paraphernalia) used to inject drugs
- Blood transfusions and organ transplants before July 1992
- Sexual contact with someone who has hep C
- Having a mother who had hep C when you were born.

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others. For more, see the Basics of HIV/AIDS in POZ.com, a sister publication of HepMag.com, RealHealthMag.com, CancerHealth.com and TuSaludMag.com.

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