

Aids victims: When will they be paid?

Calum Macrae and
John McChie

JONATHAN WRAY, whose wife and three-year-old child died of Aids after she was given contaminated blood by the NHS, speaks out today in support of *The Observer's* campaign to win compensation for the hundreds of forgotten victims of Aids.

His Aids Related Compensation Scheme immune system is breaking down and he has only a limited time to live. 'I think, morally, the Government should say, "Yes, we made a mistake", he urged yesterday.

But Health Minister Virginia Bottomley has written to solicitors acting for the forgotten NHS Aids victims reiterating the Government's refusal to reach a settlement.

'The Government does not accept that they have a stronger claim than other patients who may have been injured as a result of medical accidents or as an unintended side-effect of medical treatment,' she said.

Labour leader Neil Kinnock last night condemned the Government's response and prom-

ised to raise the issue in the Commons after the Whitsun recess. 'There is no logic in denying compensation for these poor people, and there is certainly no mercy,' he said. 'The government must change its attitude -- and quickly.'

Jonathan, 35, contracted the virus from his wife Mandy, who was given HIV-contaminated blood during an NHS transfusion in 1982 after the birth of her first son Andrew.

It was four years before doctors realised, and in that time she married Jonathan and had another son, John, born in 1985. 'We didn't know anything about Aids or HIV until she got ill,' he said. 'It was just before

she died, in October 1986, that we found out she had Aids. After my wife's test, they said they wanted to test me and the two laddies. Andrew was negative, he was safe. But me and John were positive.'

In 1988 John died. Now Jonathan Wray is increasingly unwell. 'I haven't actually developed Aids, but the immune system is only 25 per cent of what it should be.' He is taking AZT and other intensive and difficult treatments, but remains highly susceptible to infection. 'I only have a certain amount of time left. I don't want to waste my time going back and forth to court, I want to be doing things that I want.'

The Department of Health has a responsibility for the NHS Aids victims,' he argues. 'They should give financial help to those who need it so they don't have to go to court and waste the rest of their lives trying to get a few thousand pounds. People shouldn't have to go cap in hand trying to prove they are entitled to compensation. Everybody knows they are morally entitled to it.'

Killed by the NHS, p4

AIDS victims of the NHS

Illogical, indefensible, unjust

WE HAVE highlighted today the tragic case of Jonathan Wray, whose life and family have been devastated by Aids, because we believe that a serious injustice is being done. The Government's continuing refusal to compensate Aids victims who were infected by blood transfusions while undergoing surgery in NHS hospitals is both indefensible and illogical.

It took five years of public pressure and the threat of legal action before Ministers agreed adequate levels of compensation for haemophiliacs who were stricken with Aids as a result of being treated with infected blood

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products by the NHS. The result of this delay was that many of them died before they or their families received a penny of compensation. It will be deplorable if the same curmudgeonly and legalistic approach is adopted towards this very much smaller group of 400 Aids victims.

The cost to the NHS of a generous settlement would be minimal. The claim by lawyers that this would open the floodgates to other victims of medical accidents is characteristically overcautious. The Department of

Health's claim that there is a clear distinction between the haemophiliacs infected through blood products and those infected during surgery is such obvious nonsense that it is surprising it can be seriously advanced.

If Ministers wish to protect the image of a caring National Health Service, they must face up to the consequences of past mistakes. No amount of money can erase the suffering of these NHS victims of Aids. But it will be a disgrace if they are forced to appeal to the courts before they can secure justice. There is a tragedy for which we are all responsible.

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