

24 March 2011

New financial support measures for people infected with contaminated blood – McGimpsey

Health Minister Michael McGimpsey today announced that he has accepted the recommendations of the Contaminated Blood Review.

The recommendations of the review, which was led by the Department of Health in England, will extend the scope of existing financial support provisions for people in Northern Ireland infected with NHS contaminated blood.

The Minister said: **“It is only right and proper that people in Northern Ireland whose lives, and families, have been adversely affected by NHS treatment with infected blood should be appropriately supported.**

“These new measures will ensure that additional financial support will be provided to people who have been affected, particularly those who are suffering most or experiencing financial hardship as a result of their condition.”

The Minister continued: **“I hope these additional financial measures will go some way towards helping to improve the lives of those tragically infected with hepatitis C by contaminated blood products.”**

The new support provisions will:

- Introduce an annual payment of £12,800 for those living with hepatitis C who qualify for Stage 2 payments from the Skipton Fund. These payments will be backdated to 10 January 2011.
- Increase the one-off payment made to those who qualify for Stage 2 payments from £25,000 to £50,000.
- Allow posthumous claims to be made on behalf of people who died before August 29, 2003 when the Skipton Fund was established. In Northern Ireland, there will be no deadline for relatives to register to claim up to £70,000.
- Give access to a discretionary fund for patients and/or their dependants suffering financial hardship.
- Allow relevant patients who develop hepatitis C-related B cell lymphoma to be eligible to claim for Stage 2 payment
- Increase the annual payment for those with hepatitis C/HIV in line with the consumer price index.

Families of individuals may now register to make claims on behalf of loved ones who have passed away. Anyone with hepatitis C who may be eligible under the new arrangements can find out more about what they need to do by contacting the Skipton Fund at: <http://www.skiptonfund.org> or by emailing: apply@skiptonfund.org

Notes to editors:

1. Currently, anyone with chronic hepatitis C contracted from contaminated blood receives a one-off payment of £20,000. A further £25,000 is paid to those who go on to develop serious liver disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. Both these payments are made by the UK-wide Skipton Fund, which was set up in 2003 to support people infected with hepatitis C from NHS blood products.

2. The plans in Northern Ireland are in line with the announcements made by the Department of Health for England on 10 January, the Scottish Government for Scotland on 4 March and the Welsh Assembly

Government on the 8 March.

3. Two aspects of the review will be handled differently in Northern Ireland:

The changes to prescription “season tickets” will not apply in Northern Ireland as prescription charges have been abolished.

The proposals for additional access to counselling services will be considered within the current service provision for those with haemophilia in Northern Ireland.

4. The Skipton Fund was set up in 2003 as a company limited by guarantee.

5. The principal activity of the company is to implement and manage the UK-wide ex gratia payments scheme for people infected with Hepatitis C from NHS treatment with blood, blood products or tissue.

6. The company acts as agent for the Department of Health, which in turn acts for the health departments of the devolved administrations.

7. Media enquiries to DHSSPS Press Office on 028 9052 0571. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Office via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.