

APPENDIX 3



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Statement by Dr Brenton Wylie at meeting convened by ARCBS Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney 10:00 am Thursday 27th May, 2004

"Firstly, on behalf of the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS) I would like to thank you all for your time today and say that we are extremely pleased that you have agreed to meet with us in this forum.

This meeting is really a result of the hearings that took place as part of the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into Hepatitis C and the blood supply. At those hearings, we listened carefully to the concerns of those who made submissions to the inquiry and reflected upon what was said.

A number of things have become clear to us as a result of the hearings and we felt that it would be beneficial to instigate a face to face forum today. Primarily we are here today to express to you, as representatives of organisations who act on behalf of those affected by hepatitis C, our sorrow at what has occurred.

We are also here today because we understand the importance of establishing a dialogue with you, and would like to seek your input in terms of how best to move forward to support those affected by hepatitis C.

The Red Cross has recognised that, in the past, some blood-transfusion recipients contracted hepatitis C virus from blood transfusions.

This is a terrible fact and we are sorry that this occurred.

We are sorry that for some of those recipients contracting hepatitis C has resulted in often debilitating physical symptoms of this disease, and in some cases, unfair discrimination. We as individuals at the ARCBS have been distressed to hear of people's particular situations.

As we have stated before, we extend our sympathy to each Australian who has acquired hepatitis C, including those who have contracted it through blood transfusions. We recognise the impact that this disease can have on the person and their family.

However, as we said at the Inquiry, we maintain that we acted and took decisions responsibly and in accordance with the best available scientific knowledge at the time and, accordingly, we do not accept liability.

As part of this forum, we would also like to say that there have been specific circumstances mentioned in the hearings when it is clear that we have not always met the expectations of the people with hepatitis C in terms of how we have interacted with them.

We would like to make it clear that this was not deliberate or through lack of compassion. All those within the ARCBS are human beings and have the very best of intentions at all times.

We hope that we have learned from our experiences and intend to implement improved systems wherever practicable in our day to day dealings with those affected by hepatitis C.

As a humanitarian organisation and charity, which is dependent on the goodwill of the Australian public, ARCBS fully recognises the importance of transparency in its activities and we acknowledge that there has been frustration about our inability to discuss issues in relation to the legal process.

The fact is that because of our obligations of confidentiality, we cannot discuss issues relating to this, however we are here today because we, at ARCBS, believe that there is some common ground between all the organisations represented at this table.

We share a common concern for those affected by transfused hepatitis C. We are committed to continuing to provide services such as Lookback, counselling and referral services to those affected both as a result of a transfusion, and those identified through the donation program. Importantly we are committed to continuing to improve these services in consultation with the Australian and State and Territory governments.

What we would now like to focus on is the present and the future and we would like to discuss with you today how we are able to move forward beyond the senate inquiry. We are keen to hear your thoughts on constructive ways to improve our existing services and dealings with those who have hepatitis C as we move forward.

Again I'd like to say that the circumstances that bring us together today are very sad ones.

That anyone ever received hepatitis C through a blood transfusion is a terrible fact.

We are very sorry that this ever occurred. We would like to listen to you today and hope that we can find a positive outcome from this process together with you all."