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From: Dr A Wight

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ALLEGED CASE OF CJD IN TEENAGER: PRESS ARTICLES 25 JANUARY

The problem

1. The attached articles from "Today", the "Daily Mail", and the "Daily Mirror" on a teenage girl alleged to be suffering from CJD refer. This case was first described on 13 January in "Today". Briefing for the Prime Minister prepared at that time is at A.
2. On 20 January "Today" reported 3 other cases in teenagers and further line was prepared addressing this particular issue and reinforcing the earlier briefing. This is at B. A statement on 20 January from the hospital where this case is being looked after makes it clear that the diagnosis of CJD has not been established (at C).
3. Today's articles make a further allegation. This is that the doctor from the CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh (funded by DH and SHHD), who visited the family when CJD was suggested as a possible diagnosis, made a remark about the undesirability of the family talking to the Press. This has been interpreted as the "establishment experts" not wanting the case exposed for political reasons because of the associations with BSE (and hamburger consumption) if the girl was found to be suffering from CJD.

Handling

4. In addition, Channel 4 is due to broadcast "Dispatches" (made by Fulcrum Productions) tomorrow evening, 26 January. The programme will cover the above issues. Paragraph 2 of a letter from Fulcrum (at D) includes a transcript of an interview recorded for the programme with the teenage girl's relative. A copy of the reply from Dr Will, head of the CJD Surveillance Unit, to Fulcrum is also enclosed. The points Dr Will makes are fully endorsed by the Department. It is worth noting that Dr Will had earlier spent a considerable amount of time briefing Fulcrum on the CJD Surveillance Unit's activities and on general CJD issues.

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5. The implication of a cover-up with respect to the diagnosis in this case and possible links with BSE cannot be substantiated. Although the Department does not comment on individual cases, the hospital concerned has made a clear statement. Further, cumulative anonymised data on the incidence of confirmed and possible cases of CJD are reported annually to Parliament by the CJD Unit. The last report was made in July 1993. Data, including case reports, are regularly published in the scientific literature. MAFF also regularly publish statistics on the BSE epidemic and made reports to Parliament, in addition to funding a large research programme on BSE.
6. There is no reason at present to change the advice given by the CMO, Dr Calman in March 1993 (at E), that British beef is safe and the public health is properly protected.
7. Background briefing on CJD and BSE including the measures in place to protect the public from any risk of BSE is at F.

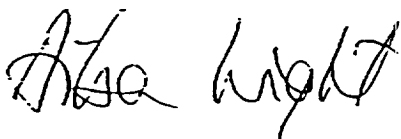
Line to take

There is no new information to suggest a change to the lines previously prepared at A and B. The points made still stand.

In the light of today's press coverage (and the imminent "Dispatches" programme) however, the following should be added:

"It remains the case that the Department does not comment on individual cases, or on what is reported to have occurred during confidential interviews between the family concerned and a doctor. The hospital looking after the case in question has made a clear statement about the nature of the illness. Detailed information on cases of CJD in the UK is collected and made public on an annual basis by the CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh. Reports are also freely published in the scientific literature.

There is nothing to suggest that the advice given by the CMO in March 1993 on the safety of beef and beef products needs to be revised."



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Enc.