

CONFIDENTIAL FILING

The Spread of Meningococcal Meningitis

NATIONAL HEALTH

March 1987

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
3.4.87							
PREM 19/2351							

Questions?

File AFJ



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

3 April 1987

Dear Geoff

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to Andy Bearpark here of 27 March, together with the attachments and the background note setting out the current position on the spread of meningococcal meningitis.

The Prime Minister has looked through your progress report carefully. She appreciates the difficulties there have been in dealing with the problem, and was pleased to note the positive and determined approach which your Minister and her colleagues have been taking.

I am copying this letter to Chris de Grouchy (Department of Education and Science), Andy Rinning (Scottish Office) and John Shortridge (Welsh Office).

Yours

Mark Addison

Mark Addison

G.H. Langsdon, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security.

Do

PRIME MINISTER

Baroness Trumpington wanted to let you know the up to date position on the incidence of meningitis. The attached letter from DHSS provides all you need to know. The press cuttings and factual background note provide more information if you wish to glance through them.

Baroness Trumpington has clearly not been having an easy time of it, and has been coming in for a good deal of criticism from the local press. Most of the complaints seem to allege inadequate Government support for research, though DHSS have done what they can to speed things up, as well as draw attention to the fact that research has to be properly targetted, and on the right tracks, before it can do anybody any good.

Agree that I should tell Baroness Trumpington's office that you have looked through her progress report carefully, that you appreciate the difficulties of dealing with this problem at present, and you have been pleased to note the positive and determined approach Baroness Trumpington has been taking?

Mark Addison

Yes mt

MARK ADDISON

31 March 1987



MEA -

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

P A Bearpark Esq
 Private Secretary
 10 Downing Street
 LONDON
 SW1

27 March 1987

Dear Andy,

Following the Prime Minister's reply on 16 March to a Question from Simon Hughes about meningitis, a copy of which I enclose, Baroness Trumpington thought that the Prime Minister should be kept up to date with the situation. The adverse publicity which has been running for some time in the local press has continued unabated, following a visit by Lady Trumpington to the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research (CAMR) at Porton Down at which the press were present. I enclose a copy of cuttings from the Western Daily Press.

Play A. Although we supplied a background note on research into meningitis with the draft answer, by way of further background, I should explain that, while compared with many other diseases the numbers of cases of meningococcal meningitis are small (873 in England and Wales in 1986), the incidence has doubled over the last three years, and the levels so far this year are even higher. Past experience shows it to have a cyclical pattern. Other countries are also struggling with the problem, as was evident from an international meeting which the Chief Medical Officer called last year. It is a particularly distressing disease because it can strike young children without warning and unless treated quickly can kill them. It therefore lends itself to sensational media coverage, and campaigns for further research readily command public sympathy. Both these elements have been very successfully harnessed by a pressure group, the Meningitis Trust, formed as a result of an outbreak at Stroud.

It is a frustrating disease in that while vaccines are available against some forms of it (strains A and C), for others none as yet exist and will inevitably take some years to develop. Knowing where best to focus research on the disease itself is also difficult. But in consequence it is not difficult to portray government as laggardly and as not doing enough.

E.R.

The articles focus mainly on research and quote scientists as claiming that MRC funds are short: "That's Thatcherism". The pressure group allege that an earlier undertaking that shortage of money would not impede research is not being honoured and that consequently the Trust is having to fund it.

As the background note on research explained, two important pieces of research have been funded: the Stonehouse survey and work to develop a vaccine against the particular B15 strain. Biomedical research is for the MRC so far as government funding is concerned. Applications must be submitted to the MRC and be subjected to the usual rigorous scrutiny, including assessment by referees, before a grant can be considered. This does inevitably take time, and project proposals compete with each other for limited funds. Understandably, those frustrated are tempted to make political capital out of it.

Meningitis research is to be considered at an annual meeting between the MRC and Health Departments on 31 March. Meanwhile DHSS has asked the MRC through special concordat arrangements applying to research to which DHSS attaches a high priority, to deal as expeditiously as possible with an application the Council has now received from Professor Weir of Edinburgh University.

Lady Trumpington wrote to the editor of the Western Daily Press on 25 March re-iterating the position on research and emphasising that the Department was not dragging its heels. The paper's reaction was not helpful and Lady Trumpington is not disposed to continue the correspondence. Ministers will otherwise continue to defend the record as and when necessary. In addition Ministers are considering whether there is any more that can reasonably be done and whether a more positive image can be projected by issuing advice to doctors about the rising incidence of the disease and by making more generally available a public information leaflet developed out of the Stroud experience.

I enclose some rather more detailed notes on the incidence of the disease, the up-to-date position on research, the role of referees in assessing research proposals and the Meningitis Trust.

I am copying this letter to Education and Science, Scottish Home and Health Department and Welsh Office.

*Yours Ours
Geoff*

G H LANGSDON
Private Secretary

Encs

1 ONLY

To P. HAYWARD, D HSE 1.D.

Storm grows over meningitis cash

The menace of meningitis



We ARE on your side

I HAVE seen the article in Monday's edition by Steve Eginton about research into meningitis and thought it might be helpful if I set the record straight.

But first let me comment on your suggestion of a "view" — from which your readers might be forgiven for assuming that the scientists and the Department are not on the same side in the fight against meningitis. This is not the case. I have emphasised on a number of occasions that we in the Department are only too aware of the increased prevalence of meningococcal meningitis, and that we are prepared to receive and consider proposals for research into this problem.

However, two points need to be

Junior Health Minister, Baroness Trumpington, responds to criticism that the Government is not doing enough to aid meningitis research

made absolutely clear. Firstly, all research projects have to be carefully reviewed by independent scientists. Secondly, some of them will relate directly to Health Services research (such as the Stonehouse Meningococcal Survey) and will therefore be considered for direct funding by the Department of Health's Research Management Division, while others will relate to biomedical research which is properly the concern of the Medical Research Council.

This is not a case of Government dragging its heels — your readers will appreciate that the

role of the independent scientists to assess projects before funds are committed is to:

- i. judge its likelihood of success;
- ii. measure the quality of the science;
- iii. assess whether it is new work or repeat work already done;
- iv. consider its ethical suitability.

Having said this, I must repeat that neither I nor the Department has even seen proposals which some people are accusing us of ignoring.

The development of a vaccine to protect people against meningococcal meningitis is our first target. The Centre for Applied

Microbiological research (which I visited last week) is satisfied that progress in the development of the B15 vaccine is going smoothly. This work is government funded.

The results of the Stonehouse Survey should be available in the near future. This survey was also government funded.

One final point. The local health authority in Gloucester has produced an excellent leaflet on meningitis for distribution to parents. My Department is considering urgently the best form of production and distribution of this leaflet — this too will be government funded.

I hope your readers will be reassured and I shall continue to do my best to see the momentum is maintained.



The Baroness Trumpington

No, Minister!

You've let us down, brain bug campaigners tell the Baroness



Feedback to Monday's Press

JUNIOR health minister Baroness Trumpington came under attack again last night — for rebuffing the Western Daily Press for saying she had failed in her promise to find funds for meningitis.

The Baroness's letter to the Press denies there was a row between her department and scientists researching the brain bug.

And the Baroness, who promised financial support for meningitis research in a speech to parents in Stonehouse last August, denied the Government was now dragging its heels in considering research programmes.

But last night she came under renewed attack from the Stroud-based Meningitis Trust, which said she had broken her promise to ensure adequate research funds were made available.

And a leading meningitis expert, Professor Donald Weir, of

Edinburgh University, said:

"I have seen the article in the Press. It was a very good article. Congratulations. I certainly felt it was a good description of the present position."

On Monday the Press described how three leading experts, including Professor Richard Moxon, head of paediatrics at Oxford University, had applied to the Meningitis Trust for research funds.

Professor Moxon said he already received support from

the Medical Research Council but said it was not enough.

He has asked the Meningitis Trust for £500,000 to support a new national meningitis laboratory in Oxford.

In her letter Baroness Trumpington says she cannot be accused of ignoring their research proposals, which should have been made to the research council.

Yesterday the Press reported that the MRC was considering cuts in its funding, unless the

Government provided further support.

The Meningitis Trust's campaign secretary, Jackie Totterdell, said last night:

"The public needs more than sympathy. We accept that scientific and ethical criteria must be met and we are not asking her to cut corners in scientific terms."

"But we cannot accept that she could not help the vital Edinburgh project, which has faced enormous bureaucratic problems."

"What the public would like to hear is a reiteration of her statement to the people of Stonehouse."

"We naively assumed that she and her department were in a position of power and could have some say in getting funds for vital research projects."

Answer the questions, Baroness

JUNIOR Health Minister Baroness Trumpington has been commendably quick to respond to the Western Daily Press charge of her inaction over meningitis research. It came by return of post.

At a pity she and her department could not show such a turn of speed in untangling the red tape which now delays the vital research projects for which we pleaded.

She appears hurt that we suggest there is a row over the fact that these projects are begging for funds. If she does not believe us, she should ask the professors with the begging bowls herself.

But the Baroness shows a marked distaste for direct action. She does not once accept that her department has a responsibility to speed a solution. She does not see herself as a conduit for research funds, or as a co-ordinator to bring together or rationalise the various research projects which are on offer.

Indeed the Baroness complains that she has not been notified of some of these projects.

Unbriefed

Even if that were true, would it be an answer?

What sort of Minister really interested in making a dent in the problem would leave herself so lamentably unbriefed as to know nothing of projects which are begging for funds from the Meningitis Trust?

When Baroness Trumpington made her pledge to the people of Stonehouse last year that the Government shared their concerns, she should have called together experts on the disease, sought their advice on the state of the research, and asked for their evaluation of projects on offer.

These projects needing further assessment should have been directed immediately to the appropriate review body, with a recommendation that cash would be made available, if the research was genuinely worthwhile. It did not happen.

The Health Department has not even been an efficient postman, let alone co-ordinator of the fight against meningitis.

The fear is now that when these projects do finally reach the assessment stage, they will fail simply because there is no money left.

Baroness Trumpington ignores that fear. And yet it goes to the heart of her pledge that money would be made available.

By whom, to whom, how much and when, Baroness?

That is the question the West country wants answered. Preferably by return of post.

W. DAILY PRESS 25-3-87

FROM SMYTH, HPO, SW

1 ONLY

To Paul Hayward D HSS I.D From Lynette HPO, SW

Lollipop man is licked in beer row

A WEST lollipop man sacked for being drunk on his first day at work said: "I only had a couple of pints to celebrate getting the job."

Retired Army Sergeant, Ernie Hale, aged 59, said yesterday: "It was my first job in nine years and I went down the pub at lunchtime for a little celebration."

"But I was not drunk in the afternoon and I did the job perfectly safely."

Mr Hale, who lives opposite Robinswood Primary School in Matson, Gloucester, started work as the school's lollipop man last Friday morning.

That afternoon he was out of work again after headmaster Mr Terry Allan told him to hand back his white coat, cap and road sign.

Mr Hale, a widower who lives on an army pension, said: "I did not consider myself drunk when I went back, but maybe the headmaster thought I was because he could smell the beer on my breath."

He said he would not be challenging Mr Allen's decision.

OBITUARY

Captain Edward Robertson Clark

RETIRED master mariner Captain Edward Robertson Clark has died in Manor Park Hospital, Bristol.

Captain Clark, who was 93, and lived in Grove Park, Brislington, served at sea during both world wars. His career spanned a total of 46 years.

He was awarded the Lloyds silver medal for brave conduct and was mentioned in despatches when his tanker m.v. Scottish Standard was bombed in the Atlantic in February 1941.

He was twice wounded in further enemy actions.

Captain Clark was a widower and leaves two sons and two grandsons.

The funeral is at St Luke's parish church, Brislington, at 2.30pm on Monday March 30, followed by interment at Greenbank cemetery.

WEST'S CAMPAIGNING MPS PUT PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT

Plea to aid brain disease fight

Tackle these holiday home sharks'

By Lynne Hutchinson

MP JACK Aspinwall plans to contact Mrs Thatcher to try to get cash for research into meningitis.

Mr Aspinwall, the Tory MP for Wansdyke, said because of the increase in incidence of the brain disease there should be Government support for vital research.

"A lot of government research is going, quite rightly, into Aids but meningitis is a disease which is on the increase and vital research is needed to solve what is a desperate problem," he said.

Junior health minister,



Jack Aspinwall ... appeal



Margaret Thatcher ... criticised



Baroness Trumpington ... promise

Baroness Trumpington, promised last year that Government cash would be made available for meningitis research.

She has since said that the funds are going towards producing a vac-

cine and that other scientists investigating the disease should apply for funds to the Medical Research Council.

The council will meet tomorrow to consider cuts to keep within its £133

said the chances of meningitis research getting funds were slim.

He said: "A whole range of excellent projects are being turned down as it is."

"What we need of course is for the Government to change direction. They probably don't realise how serious the situation is."

Shortage of cash has also hit the Science and Engineering Research Council, which has announced it can make no new grants for research until September, unless the government provides more funds.

Bristol University spokesman Don Carleton said they received £10 million a year in research funding and a quarter of staff depended on research council grants.

He said: "There was already a crisis in research funding. We are seeing the collapse of the whole research and development system in Britain."

The university itself held an emergency senate meeting on Friday to discuss how to make cuts of more than £3 million in the next two years.

Labour's shadow spokesman on science and technology, Dr Jeremy Bray, has already written to Mrs Thatcher asking her to intervene.

He said: "The Government coffers, we are told, are awash with money, yet science is in crisis."

"At a time of rapid scientific and technological development, Government policy is closing down our research capability."

A spokesman for the department of education and science said: "The Government recognises that the research councils have a problem. We are considering it."

By Simon Mares

BRISTOL South MP Michael Cocks is hoping to launch an all-party campaign to curb the activities of rogue time-share salesmen.

The Labour MP wants the government to take action to crack down on dubious and pressure sales techniques used by some.

He has asked consumer affairs minister Michael



MICHAEL COCKS

Howard a series of questions on the issue, and this week was told that 40 written complaints and man others by telephone had been received by the minister's department over the salesmen.

Now Mr Cocks is hoping to link up with MPs from other parties to press for curbs on the salesmen to be included in all the party manifestoes for the general election, so that there is a commitment to take action whoever wins.

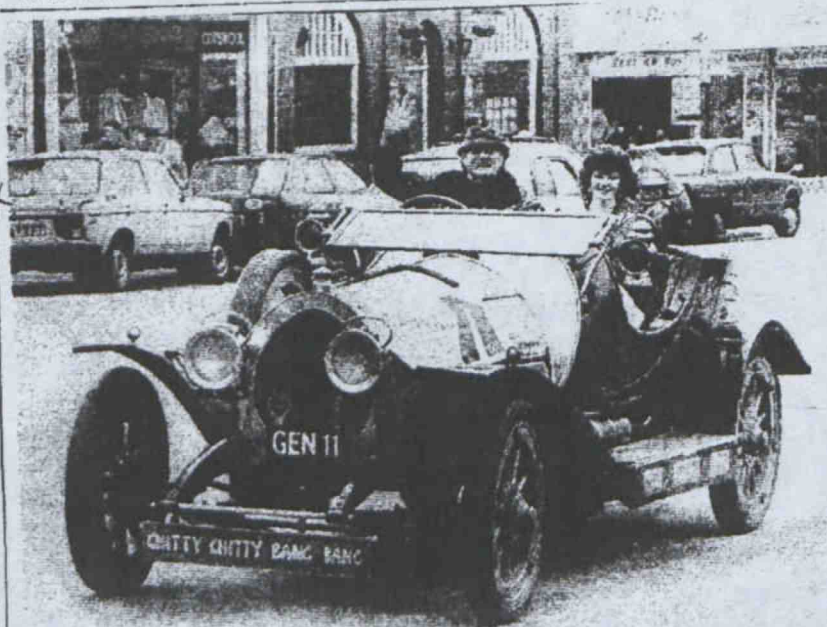
He said: "I will be consulting with colleagues and will be putting a bit of steam behind it because at the moment the government is not really taking it seriously."

LABOUR NURSERY FIGHT IN WEST

By Mike Prestage

A LABOUR campaign for better childcare and nursery care in the West got under way today.

Mr Derek Fatchett MP, the campaign co-ordinator, was



CHARITY WITH A BANG

Miss Avon, Helen Blake, flying along in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, with its owner and driver, Piersie Picton, in Gloucester Road, Bishopston, Bristol. They collected money for the British Heart Foundation.

The event was organised by the National Tyre Service Centre to celebrate the refurbishment of its premises in Gloucester Road. The amount raised will be matched by the company.

PICTURE: CHRIS SELBY.

A record run for 'Mr RAC'

GEORGE Leigh is retiring after 23 years as area manager for the RAC in



WOP 26/3/87

Storm as cuts hit campaign HQ

By Beverley Hawes

A ROW erupted last night after cuts in West job training schemes halted work on the new national headquarters for the Meningitis Trust.

The cuts mean that over the next year job training scheme places

in the region will be reduced by more than 1,200 to 15,790.

Yesterday Scout Enterprises (Western), which is funded by the Manpower Services Commission, said it would have to cut jobs on community schemes from 120 to 80.

And it immediately ordered five young people preparing the

new Meningitis Trust base in Bath Road, Stroud, to stop work half way through the seven-week project.

Shocked trust campaign secretary Jackie Totterdell said: "This is a terrible blow. We have no idea if we will ever see the workforce again."

Scout manager Mr Tony Williams said

work had to stop while the group assessed how the cuts would be implemented.

But a spokesman for the MSC in Bristol attacked the move, and said there was no reason why the project should have been halted so suddenly.

"It is unfair to lay all the blame at our door."

BLOW FOR CHARITY AS JOBS SLASHED

Glo Echo

25/3/87

DW

TRAINING SCHEMES for the jobless in Gloucestershire have been rocked by major cash cut-backs which will mean 280 "redundancies."

Contin 23/3/87 DW

2

Press campaign exclusive

26.3.87

W Daily Press

Brain bug mothers' plea to Maggie

By Steve Egginton

GRIEVING mothers of meningitis victims are to appeal direct to Mrs Thatcher for help in beating the disease.

The first of a series of letters from women across the country was on its way to number ten Downing Street last night.

One letter from Mrs Gloria Dayman, of Alveston, near Thornbury said:

"I am writing to you as a mother who has lost a 14-month-old little boy.

Millions of pounds are being spent on AIDS but more children are dying from meningitis and very little is being done.

I beg of you to intervene personally."

Mrs Dayman and her husband Steve were among the first couples to lose a child in the current outbreak. Their son Spencer died four years ago.

Yesterday Mrs Dayman met Mrs Avril Ryman, from Burford Close, Southdown, Bath to prepare a personal appeal to Mrs Thatcher.

Mrs Ryman lost her ten-month-old son Bradley on January 31. She expects another child in August.

No chance

She and her husband Paul, an engineer, also have a two-year-old son, Ashley.

Mrs Ryman, aged 25, said: "He just didn't stand a chance. It was so quick. He died five hours after we got him to hospital."

Mrs Simone Matthews, aged 34, from Swanley, Kent, has lost two children Neil, aged ten months, and Claire, eight months.

She and her husband Kevin have another child, Thomas, aged one.

Mrs Matthews said: "I don't



Spencer Dayman, aged 13 months, who died four years ago.



Mrs Gloria Dayman, left, and Mrs Avril Ryman writing their letters yesterday.

'I AM WRITING AS A MOTHER WHO HAS LOST A LITTLE BOY'

think the Government is doing half of what they should be doing. Everybody seems to think it's only happened in Stroud, but it's all over the country."

Mrs Lynn Killip and her husband Michael, from Nuneston, lost their son Daniel, aged 16 months, on Boxing Day.

Mr Killip said: "I shall tell Mrs Thatcher that the Government should be putting more resources into this. We know it's the seventh or eighth case in Nuneston."

Mrs Jackie Wilkinson and her husband Geoff, from Durham lost their son Scott, aged eight months, last March.

Mrs Wilkinson, who is expecting another child in July, has gone into hospital for checks.

Mr Wilkinson said: "We shall write to the Prime Minister. I hope it will do some good."

The parents of other child victims in the Stroud area are also

preparing letters to the Prime Minister.

Wansdyke Tory MP Mr Jack Aspinwall has already written to her supporting the Western Daily Press campaign to win more Government cash for meningitis research.

TORY MPs yesterday accused the Government of failing to fund research councils adequately.

Cutting

Mr David Crouch (Canterbury), of the Medical Research Council, said during an all-night Commons sitting that academic staff had a phased pay rise of 24 per cent but funding is up just 2.6 per cent.

He said it could mean "cutting back on research, on reducing our scientific effort, at a time when everybody knows we should be doing just the opposite."

Storm as cuts hit campaign HQ

By Beverley Hawes

A ROW erupted last night after cuts in West job training schemes halted work on the new national headquarters for the Meningitis Trust.

The cuts mean that over the next year job training scheme places

in the region will be reduced by more than 1,200 to 15,790.

Yesterday Scout Enterprises (Western), which is funded by the Manpower Services Commission, said it would have to cut jobs on community schemes from 120 to 80.

And it immediately ordered five young people preparing the

new Meningitis Trust base in Bath Road, Stroud, to stop work half way through the seven-week project.

Shocked trust campaign secretary Jackie Tottenham said: "This is a terrible blow. We have no idea if we will ever see the workforce again."

Scout manager Mr Tony Williams said

work had to stop while the group assessed how the cuts would be implemented.

But a spokesman for the MSC in Bristol attacked the move, and said there was no reason why the project should have been halted so suddenly.

"It is unfair to lay all the blame at our door."

Stephen, a pupil at Tebbury Hill Primary School, was taken on Monday to a doctor who sent him home, but his condition worsened on Tuesday morning and an ambulance took him to hospital.

Last night his grandfather, Mr Charles Smart, said: "I'm not sure how it could be glandular fever, but we are not quite sure."

There have been seven cases of meningococcal meningitis in Wiltshire this year.

Last night members of the Stroud-based Meningitis Trust were comforting the distraught relatives of the Bristol victim.

Page 2: Brain bug mothers in plea to Maggie

Brain bug baby

From Page One

Baby girl dies as brain bug strikes again

By Jonathan Shorney and Richard Baynes

AN EIGHT-month-old baby girl has died of a rare form of meningitis in Bristol Children's Hospital, it was confirmed last night.

And last night it was suspected seven-year-old Stephen Hicks from Malmesbury, critically ill in hospital, also has meningitis.

The girl, who came from Bristol, died on Monday of the pneumococcal bacteriological strain which claimed 25-year-old Devises mother-of-two Amanda Disney two weeks ago.

This form of the disease is distinct from the lethal meningococcal strain responsible for the spate of West deaths.

Stephen's parents, Trevor and Cindy, from the new White Lion estate in Malmesbury, were at his bedside at Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon, awaiting the outcome of tests.

Cont. on Page 2

BS
WDP
26/3/87

SLASHED

TRAINING SCHEMES for the jobless in Gloucestershire have been rocked by major cash cut-backs which will mean 280 "redundancies."

The cuts threaten vital Manpower Services Commission projects — and one of the first to be hit is the county-based meningitis charity.

A five-man MSC workforce have been building a new headquarters for the charity in Stroud but say they have now been forced to quit halfway through the work.

The workers are part of the giant MSC community projects workforce in Gloucestershire.

The schemes employ thousands of jobless youngsters and men but Government bosses have said they are costing too much.

Training cuts

An MSC spokesman said today: "There has been a national re-appraisal of the community programme.

"It is planned that 280 training places will be removed in Gloucestershire — but there will be no enforced redundancies."

The spokesman said she could not "understand" why the workers on the charity headquarters project had suddenly stopped work.

"I cannot see any reason for that and don't know what's happening there," she added.

'Terrible blow'

MSC community programme trainees are often set to work on important social projects like the charity headquarters.

Today Stroud Meningitis Trust campaign secretary Jackie Totterdell said: "Our workforce pulled out yesterday four weeks into a seven week building programme.

"They took all their equipment with them, and have not turned up today.

"This is a terrible blow

to us for two reasons — we would hate to see these lads on the dole, and it leaves us with a half completed headquarters.

"We have begged and borrowed paint, furnishings and other equipment for the new headquarters — to date it has cost us just £12.75," said Miss Totterdell.

"The generosity of the people of Gloucestershire and Stroud in particular has been magnificent and for the MSC to pull its people out is a slap in the face for them. The area manager for the Commission is making a special appeal to get permission for the lads to complete the work."

Latypin 23/5/87 DW

Enterprise job losses feared

STRINGENT cuts by the Manpower Services Commission could throw community programme workers based at Stonehouse back on the dole.

Reductions in the number of employees allowed at Scout Enterprises' Old Boathouse base could force nearly 50 sackings, said manager Mr Tony Williams.

"We seem to be witnessing the beginning of the destruction of the scheme. MSC appear to have reversed their role from creating work to making people redundant," he said.

Scout Enterprises now has places for 139 people but actually employ 120. The Government ruling is to reduce the number of places to around 80.

Mr Williams says that many people would suffer if the community programme was hit

among them hundreds of elderly and handicapped people whose gardens have been dug and weeded.

The locally based Meningitis Trust has also complained that a Scout Enterprise decorating and building team was withdrawn midway through its task at the Trust's new headquarters at Lightpill.

Other Enterprise projects included land clearance for a camp site at Cranham and a canal clearance scheme. However a pottery, also run at the Old Boat House, looked safe for the time being.

Mr Ray Smith, Scout Enterprises' regional chief in Bristol also complained about the "stringent" cuts.

"The cuts seem particularly savage around Gloucester. We come up for renewal in September and in order to reach

our target it could mean sacking 49 people now."

At the MSC's Gloucester headquarters, Link Officer Mr Laurence Atkins was more optimistic.

"I am still working through the figures. MSC does want to see, where it can be avoided, any redundancies or dismissals at all if it can be helped," he said.

Negotiations on just how to achieve a reduction in places were continuing and discussions were planned with Scout Enterprises.

"I cannot comment any further. We are trying to do this the fairest way possible, but there has been a slight misinterpretation. The figures are the maximum average figures to achieve to March 1988."

Nearly 300 places altogether were to go in the county.

Diolk Wood, MSC procc offiioor horo, would like to have an input into any briefing for No 10.

Papers have not given full MSC explanation about this.

To P Hayward, DHSS I.D.
From Smyth, HPO, SW

blems 10, Arts

Local, national, international... the on

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MONDAY, MARCH 23, 1987

**WESTERN
Daily Press**
BRISTOL
The Champion of the West

**The menace
of meningitis**

Professors hit at
red tape threat
to vital research

BEGGING LABS IN BRAIN BUG ROW

To P Hayward
DHSS I.D

From
Suzette
HPO SW

Can you
confirm
"codswallop"
quote?

See leader
attacking
DHSS, too.

Blaze wrecks Varsity of the air

A HUGE blaze broke out at the Open University last night causing damage thought to run into millions of pounds.

A fire brigade spokesman said he believed the fire, smoke and water at the university building in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire had wrecked the main computer suite.

Among equipment destroyed was a main frame computer, carrying ten years of records and research.

Bletchley fire chief, station officer Andrew Ward: "Whilst we were fighting the blaze, one of the doctors specialising in computer sciences arrived at the scene and virtually collapsed at my feet. He said that his life's work, representing more than 10 years of files, records and research data had been destroyed before his eyes."

By Steve Egginton

A ROW blew up yesterday between the Government and campaigners fighting the killer disease meningitis.

Junior Health Minister Baroness Trumpington accused three top scientists of talking "codswallop" by claiming the Government had broken its promise on meningitis research.

But three experts on the brain virus, which kills an estimated four children a week, told the Western Daily Press a lack of funding was hampering their work.

Professor Richard Moxon, of Oxford University, Dr Robert Wall, of the Government's own Medical Research Council and Professor Donald Weir, of Edinburgh University, have applied for funds, only to be told to wait, or to be offered only part of what they need.

Deplorable

But just seven months ago, Baroness Trumpington told worried parents in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire: "There is no question of funding being delayed by the Government's unwillingness to find the money."

Professor Moxon said: "This is a cop-out. The funds available to support all kinds of research, not just meningitis, have reached a deplorable state."

Professor Weir said: "I've been in this game for 25 years and it's

EXCLUSIVE

getting increasingly difficult to get research money. It's a very frustrating business."

The scientists have now approached the Gloucestershire-based Meningitis Trust for financial help.

The Trust, based in Stroud, claims meningitis is now affecting more children than AIDS — yet the only way extra money will go into research into the brain virus is by diverting it from other areas.

The Trust has been asked to raise £500,000 for a new laboratory at Oxford University, is already supporting Oxford researchers with £72,000 and has been asked for funds by two other universities.

Spokesman Steve Tomlin said: "The Government has seriously misrepresented the situation with regard to research funds."

But Baroness Trumpington hit back, saying: "It's a load of codswallop to say they have to go to the Stroud Trust if they want funds."

"Scientists who are doing research know the way to apply for funds through the Medical Research Council."

"There is no lack of money at Porton Down, where the research into a vaccine is taking place."

Centre Pages: A Battle For Funds.

B



J
ups
riv;
big

JOAN Collier TV soap; Stephanie B King a behind-the-scenes drama at British "De money in London. As the aw before a galaxy huge TV audi star Joan ar present an aw She attractio while Ste Colbys, who was sitting do guests.

But Stephan stunning gown plunging nsci unperturbed arrival.

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SEARCHLIGHT

Est. 1858 No. 41,558 Vol. 252

Not good enough, Baroness

THE Government has fallen down on its pledge to speed up the fight against meningitis.

When Health Minister Baroness Trumpington assured the people of Gloucestershire that no obstacle would be allowed to impede research into the disease which is sweeping Stroud and Stonehouse, that was seen as a positive commitment to fighting the disease.

It could, and should, have meant that the Baroness was going to cut through red tape in order to speed up research, and ensure that suitable funds were available.

The reverse has happened. The Government has hidden behind the red tape which is strangling the funds for vital research.

The Baroness herself blames research organisations for muddling their applications for funds. It won't wash.

For if that were true, it would be the duty of any Health Department and any Health Minister genuinely committed to speeding up research to sort the muddles out, rather than sitting back and using them as an excuse for inaction.

The impression from Baroness Trumpington is that while she may genuinely wish to see progress, she does not see much of a role for herself or her Department in securing that progress.

But her role is vital. She is the person who should be knocking heads together, bringing experts together, pointing researchers in the direction of funds.

Dynamic leadership is needed. If Baroness Trumpington is not up to providing that, then the Government owes it to parents, children and all those who have genuine fears over the spread of meningitis to find someone else who is. And quickly.

Gloves off

THE election may not yet have been announced, but the gloves are off.

The weekend war of words between the Tories and Labour and the Alliance shows that it is going to be bitter and personal.

That is one more good reason for an early election.

The voters do not want a protracted campaign of electioneering. They will be punch drunk at the end of it.

And while all parties will share the blame, the Tories stand to lose most.

The longer Mrs Thatcher waits, the greater the danger of voters holding her responsible for prolonging the agony. If the fight isn't going to be clean, then at least let it be quick.

125 YEARS AGO

A bomb which went off in Naples caused no damage but it prompted an immediate patriotic demonstration amongst the indignant population with cries of "Viva Italia".

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

Our work is hampered, say the scientists

by **Steve Egginton**

LAST year junior health minister Baroness Trumpington faced 300 parents at Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, who were worried their children might be the next victims of the deadly brain disease meningitis.

Several times during that emotional meeting in August she said funding would not be an obstacle in fighting the disease.

"There is no question of this being delayed by the Government's unwillingness to find the money," she said.

Yet, the Western Daily Press has spoken to three experts in meningitis research who say that a lack of funds is hampering their work.

And all three have turned to the Stroud-based Meningitis Trust for help.

Professor Richard Moxon of Oxford University wants to set up a new national laboratory to study meningitis and says he is not getting enough support from the Medical Research Council.

He has asked the Meningitis Trust for £100,000 for the next five years. They have already given him £30,000 and last week allocated £40,000.

Concerned

Professor Moxon, who is chairman of one of the research council's sub committees, said: "One is fighting tooth and nail for funding and I'm very concerned about how I'm going to make provision for the equipment, personnel and consumables to continue what is an exciting programme of research."

"It is one that is very much needed and from what I'm hearing, the public are very much concerned about meningitis, concerned enough to be doing things actively to provide funds for work to be done."

"The availability of funds from sources such as the Meningitis Trust is obviously an enormous help."

"I don't think research into meningitis is specially earmarked for negligence in terms of distribution of funds from the Medical Research Council."

"But once their funds have gone, that's it. There are no more. That's Thatcherism."

"It's a policy that's threatening the very lifeblood of the biomedical research effort in this country."

Support

"If Government policies continue not to allow even a minimum budget to support excellent research projects, then I think we've got a problem that is not only currently serious, but the ramifications for the future are enormous."

"People in science are going abroad, or into industry, or are getting out of science altogether."

Professor Moxon returned to work at Oxford after spending 14 years in the US and part of the Trust's money will pay for an American scientist to work in Oxford on meningitis research.

Part of his support is also coming from U.S. authorities.

It seems the British authorities are putting no extra resources into meningitis research, apart from work on a vaccine at Porton Down in Wiltshire.

In Parliament earlier this month a spokesman for education and science said the Medical Research Council had been given no additional funds for meningitis research.

An official at the council said



Professor Richard Moxon of Oxford University



Health

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Is the Government to help beat the b

its funds were already oversubscribed ten times.

That means every pound given to meningitis research has been taken from some other area of study.

Dr Robert Wall, a consultant microbiologist at the council's own clinical research centre, has been involved in studying specimens taken in Stonehouse during the mass swabbing of children last autumn.

And he has applied to the Meningitis Trust for equipment to help in his work.

Anxious

He said: "The equipment would cost about £9,000. We have also asked for a similar amount to support a technician to help us."

He said funding is tight for all areas of research.

Professor Donald Weir of Edinburgh University was preparing his application for funding last August at about the same time Baroness Trumpington was addressing parents in Stonehouse.

After a series of bureaucratic hiccups he has been told the application for £90,000 will be considered by the Medical Research Council in June.

He said: "There's no guarantee that we'll get the money but I know that the department of health is anxious that we do get it."

He and his wife, Dr Caroline Blackwell, originally applied to the Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust, but were offered only £13,840.

Baroness Trumpington was told of the position when she had

a private meeting with the Meningitis Trust at Stonehouse Court in November.

Professor Weir was soon afterwards asked

Fruitle

He said: "Our job helped to define who these infections were and ask why they are multiple."

A second application to the Scottish Trust, back

VACCINE DELAY

SCIENTISTS at Porton Down in Wiltshire say it could be another two years before a meningitis vaccine is ready for trials.

They are following a formula discovered by American expert Dr Carl Frasch.

But even if clinical trials are successful the vaccine will not

be publicly available in foreseeable future.

The Wellcome Foundation thought to be further afield is believed the drug company now looking for volunteers to test the first batch of a vaccine.



Ann Davis takes a swab during the Stonehouse meningitis screening last autumn

There are no delays, says the Baroness

BARONESS Trumpington says the Government is pinning its hopes on vaccine research at Porton Down in Wiltshire.

Half a dozen people are working there in a small laboratory and say it could be two years before a vaccine is ready.

After visiting the site on Friday the Baroness said: "The work on meningitis seemed to me to be proceeding very well."

"There are no delays. They have the funds they need here at this present

time and the work will take as long as it takes."

When asked why three scientists had felt it necessary to apply for funds to the Meningitis Trust, she said: "I thought I had just made it clear that there is no lack of money for Porton Down, where the research into a vaccine is taking place."

"What the people in the parts of the country that are affected want to know is when a vaccine is coming out. Work on a vaccine is proceeding as fast as scientists can."

But she said she had given her personal backing to the work being done by Professor Weir's team in Edinburgh.

She blamed the professor himself for the delay in putting in his application to the Medical Research Council.

She said: "I have written to the chief scientist and asked him to recommend that the MRC look at this project speedily, with my blessing."

Naive

Why was that not done last November when Professor Weir first wrote to her? The Baroness said: "That's a very naive point of view. At that time I passed the proposals down to our scientific people. We do not fund that type of research from the DHSS."

But why had scientists turned to the Meningitis Trust for financial support, when she had said that Government money would be available?

She said: "We've made it absolutely clear that the research has to be evaluated."

"And if the project is worthwhile, if there is going to be a good end result that is going to fill the bill from the point of view of the disease in question and be safe, then there should be the money."

Funds

"But I can't possibly comment on things I've never heard of in my life."

She said the MRC's funding was a matter for the department of education and science.

She said: "Scientists who are doing research know the way to apply for funds."

"It's a load of codswallop to say they have to go to the Stroud trust if they haven't made the approach they know they have to make to get funds."

She said other research might be worthwhile but it would not produce a vaccine which was the main consideration.



Junior health minister Baroness Trumpington

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The menace of meningitis



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department of health, proved fruitless.

He was then advised to apply to the Medical Research Council.

Baroness Trumpington's assistant private secretary wrote in December: "Lady Trumpington has asked me to say that she is keeping a very close watch on the situation and that she is being kept fully informed of developments."

Professor Weir said: "I suppose to people outside it seems a traumatic and strange situation."

Frustrating

"We are fairly used to this type of procedure. I've been in this game for 25 years and it's getting increasingly difficult to get research money."

"You have to work at it extremely hard. It's a very frustrating business."

He said the problems he has faced, despite the apparent support of the junior health minister, are only the tip of the iceberg.



Stroud Meningitis Action Group members Steve Tomlin and Jane Wells. The group's help with funds is vital for research

'We need the same urgency as the AIDS programme'

SO FAR this year meningitis has claimed more than 700 victims.

More than four people are dying from the disease every week, most of them young children.

Meningitis Trust spokesman, Steve Tomlin, said last night that the Government needs to adopt the same sense of urgency that it has over the AIDS programme.

He said: "Meningitis certainly affects far more children than AIDS does."

"Any disease that strikes at children strikes at the very heart of the community."

"The Government has seriously

misrepresented the situation with regard to research funds.

"We now know that not a single extra penny will be given to meningitis research this year, unless the Medical Research Council takes funds from another important area of research."

Request

The Trust is now considering a request from Oxford University for funds of £100,000 a year for a new national meningitis laboratory.

But Mr Tomlin said that will mean boosting their own fund-raising by £200,000 a year.

Meningitis salvo

*Bain
Arncliffe
2/13/87*

To:
P. Hayward
DHS 5 I.D
From Smyth,
HPO SW

JUNIOR health minister baroness Trumpington came under fire at a press conference in Wiltshire yesterday over Government funding for research into meningitis.

She was told that a team from Edinburgh had had to apply to the Meningitis Trust for funding because government money was not forthcoming.

But she replied that the team had applied to the Medical Research Council which is funded by the Education Department just that day. And she had written to the chief scientist asking the council to evaluate the project without delay.

The minister was speaking after she had toured the public health laboratory ser-

vice's centre for applied micro-

biology and virology. The centre is at Porton Down, next to the Ministry of Defence's chemical defence establishment, but not attached to it.

Public health laboratory service director Dr Joe Smith said researchers at the centre were developing a process which could produce consistently pure meningitis vaccine. This might go out to clinical trials in 18 months or two years' time.

Baroness Trumpington said there was no lack of money at Porton Down for research into a vaccine, and this was proceeding as fast as scientists could go.

Dr Peter Sutton, director

of the centre, said a team of six or seven people were working on the vaccine.

Dr Sutton said there were only a limited number of ways of developing a vaccine. The centre was using one approach and the Wellcome private research laboratories were using another.

Asked about the meningitis outbreak in Bath, Baroness Trumpington extended her extreme sympathy to relatives and urged everyone to contact their GP if someone showed signs of being unwell.

The flu-like symptoms of oncoming meningitis were high temperature, vomiting and headaches.

She stressed that as a bacterial disease, it is treatable.



Baroness Trumpington at yesterday's conference.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 March 1987

PRIME MINISTER

Government Data Network

Mr. Cohen asked the Prime Minister whether it is proposed that the Government data network will be connected to (a) the Post Office and (b) the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre.

The Prime Minister: No. There are at present no proposals for use of the Government data network other than by the Departments taking part in the initial examination of the concept.

Meningitis

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Prime Minister if she will establish a joint initiative by the Departments of Health and Social Security and of Education and Science, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office on research into meningitis; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I am not persuaded that a new joint initiative is necessary. Research into meningitis is, in fact, under way and arrangements already exist for liaison between the health Departments and the Medical Research Council.

The Department of Health and Social Security has funded a study to measure the prevalence of carriers, and immunity to particular strains of meningococcus, in Stonehouse, Stroud. The results are expected within two months. Linked with that study, a team at Edinburgh university is investigating aspects of vulnerability to meningococci. An application for funding the continuation of that research is being made to the MRC. The Centre for Applied Microbiological Research at Porton Down is also researching the practicability of producing a vaccine against a particular strain of meningococcus—group B—which has proved particularly troublesome and for which as yet no vaccine exists.

As part of their annual review of research activities, the health Departments will be discussing jointly with the MRC very shortly the possibility of further research into meningitis.

State Security

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government's consent was sought for the publication of material about the security and intelligence services in the book by Nigel West entitled "Molehunt".

The Prime Minister: Mr. West sent in his manuscript to the secretary of the D Notice Committee and to the Treasury Solicitor and agreed, following discussion, to remove material which the Government considered could have damaged national security or was clearly derived from breaches of confidence by present or former public

servants. The Government made absolutely clear to Mr. West that it neither authorised publication of the book nor gave any kind of approval.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Family Planning

42. Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the development divisions in Africa have any staff with experience in the areas of population and family planning; and what contact is maintained by these divisions with national family planning associations.

Mr. Chris Patten: The ODA's team of six full-time health and population advisers all have relevant experience. They are based at headquarters in London but travel widely. They maintain contacts with national family planning associations both directly and through the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Mozambique

43. Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been Her Majesty's Government's response to the recent appeal by voluntary agencies for assistance with famine in Mozambique.

Mr. Chris Patten: So far in 1987 we have made available over £2.4 million to British voluntary agencies for relief programmes in Mozambique. We have also provided £660,000 for UNICEF'S operations in that country.

In addition, we contribute £3.5 million annually to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' general programmes, which include relief work in Mozambique.

Tanzania

44. Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to provide further assistance to Tanzania in support of that country's economic reform programme.

Mr. Chris Patten: I announced a further £25 million of British aid when I visited Tanzania last week. Of this, £12 million will be for capital projects; about £6 million for the railways sector; and the remainder for programme aid on condition that Tanzania remains in agreement with the International Monetary fund on the economic reform programme.

Food Shortages

45. Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of those countries where he estimates there will be food shortages this year.

Mr. Chris Patten: The latest reports by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations list 11 countries facing abnormal food shortages: Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Sudan, Bangladesh, Kampuchea, Lebanon and Vietnam.

MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS

(a) Present position and trends in England and Wales

Cases notified during the period 1984 to 1986

Year	Cases of meningococcal meningitis notified	Deaths
1984	401	79
1985	549	94
1986	873	140

Notifications for the beginning of 1987 are considerably higher than those for the equivalent period of the previous year and it is expected that at least 1,200 cases of meningococcal meningitis will be notified in England and Wales during 1987. During the last quarter of 1986, the average weekly number of notifications was 15.4. In the first five weeks of 1987, this increased to 35.0, compared with 18.4 over the same period in 1986 and 10.6 over the same period in 1985. The increase in the first few weeks of 1987 was greater than normally seen at this time of year.

There are different types and strains of meningococcus. Approximately half the infections are Group B, particularly of the serotype 15, but recently an increasing proportion of untypable Group B organisms has appeared. (This makes production of a vaccine even more difficult.) The prevalence of Group C organisms - for which a vaccine exists - also appears to be increasing.

(5)

(b) Local outbreaks

There have been two recent outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis, both involving Group C meningococci. In each outbreak, there was a clearly definable 'at risk' population, a Naval training base and a secondary school, whilst in Stroud (Group B 15 meningococci) there has been no identifiable association between cases.

(i) Research

1. Stonehouse Meningococcal Survey

The Department have provided funds of £57,150 for a study to measure the prevalence of carriers of, and immunity to, Group B type 15 sulphonamide resistant and other strains of meningococci in the Stonehouse Parish. It is also planned that Serum IgG and IgM levels of specific antibodies to B15R and other strains of meningococci will be measured. Meetings took place on Monday 2 March to discuss the results of this Survey with Dr J M Stuart, Senior Registrar in Community Medicine, Gloucester Health Authority and Dr K Cartwright, Director, Gloucester Public Health Laboratory. After initial discussions, with representatives of MED IMCD and RMD, the researchers met Lady Trumpington to advise her of the progress of their study. Lady Trumpington then met representatives from the Stroud Meningitis Trust on 5 March.

2. Edinburgh University Research Proposal into Meningococcal Susceptibility

A project by Professor Weir and Dr Blackwell to investigate secretor status and meningococcal vulnerability was funded for one year from August 1986 by the Scottish Hospitals Endowment Research Trust. The researchers had applied for three years funding but after taking advice from SHHD, the Scottish Hospitals Endowment Research Trust (SHERT) offered one year's funding with the opportunity for Professor Weir and Dr Blackwell to present their interim results and further funds would then be considered. The Stonehouse Survey provided an opportunity for the Edinburgh Group to obtain saliva and serum samples from a community where there was a high rate of meningococcal infection. The Meningitis Research Trust provided Professor Weir with £20,000 for his work and I am informed that the results of this study will be available soon.

In addition to seeking further funds from SHERT, Professor Weir was advised to approach the MRC, and we suggested that Lady Trumpington should ask the Chief Scientist for the good offices of RMD to be used under the Concordat arrangements with MRC if this work is submitted to them. This was done on 24 February. Professor Weir indicated that he would be very happy with this arrangement, and his application has now reached MRC. Tony Newton proposes to write/has written to Kenneth Baker emphasising DHSS interest in the project.

3. Vaccine Research

It has not yet proved possible to produce a Group B vaccine, as preparation of the B Capsular Polysaccharide failed to stimulate antibodies. Considerable progress in developing Group B vaccine is being made internationally, including work in the UK at CAMR. Lady Trumpington visited CAMR on 20 March.

A promising approach makes use of purified outer membrane protein (OMP) antigen of Group B cocci and PHLS/CAMR is undertaking development of an OMP vaccine using a type B15 strain.

A second approach developed by Wellcome Ltd, involves the Group B Polysaccharide treated to make it immunogenic. Phase I studies will begin soon.

The MRC have proposed to arrange a Workshop to study current meningitis research in the UK and it is hoped that the meeting will be held in approximately two months time.

(d) ROLE OF REFEREES IN ASSESSING RESEARCH

The role of the independent scientists to assess projects before funds are committed is to:-

- i. judge likelihood of success;
- ii. measure the quality of the science;
- iii. assess whether it is new work or repeats work already done;
- iv. consider its ethical suitability.

Conclusion

Present reporting of meningococcal infection is twice that for the comparable period of 1986 and three times that of 1985. Such infections are more common over the winter/spring period and approximately 1,200 cases are predicted for this year. Outbreaks of Group C organisms have occurred in typical communities (school, the Armed Forces) and widespread vaccination has taken place for the first time in this country. There is no immediate prospect for vaccine against Group B organisms and its sporadic occurrence makes identification of at risk groups harder.

STROUD (? NATIONAL) MENINGITIS TRUST

This body was formed some 3-4 years ago during the early stages of the outbreak of meningococcal meningitis in the Stroud area. Its aims are to further research into meningococcal infection, provide information and support for affected families. We suspect it to have received substantial funds from concerned people in the area, and it is clear that the Trust and its Director Mr Steve Tomlin have received some research applications for money. We have no idea what their policy is on the use of referees for these applications. We know they have given £20,000 to Professor Weir of Edinburgh University to study non-secretor status as an index of vulnerability to meningococcal meningitis, and a small amount of money (but mainly assistance in distributing literature) to help the Stonehouse Survey.

They are also championing Professor Weir's applications, first to SHERT in Scotland and now to MRC, and they have also been approached by Professor Moxon (Professor of Paediatrics at Oxford, whose previous interest has been in haemophilus infection, a different disease). The Trust is now reported to have given Professor Moxon £70,000.

PUBLICITY LEAFLET

Gloucester DHA have produced an information leaflet for parents and a recent press report indicates that Bath DHA has also obtained this for use in its district. The Department has already approached HEC to explore how best this might be considered for use elsewhere, without inducing the panic which a "blanket" issue nationwide might conceivably cause.

DHSS

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MENINGITIS: RESEARCH

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4. Annual Stock-taking Meeting Between Health Departments and MRC

Arrangements have been made to review the scope for further action on meningitis research when the annual stock-taking meeting takes place on 31 March.

DHSS
March 1987



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