

cc/B1

PRIME MINISTER

16 December 1986

AIDS

H(A) reached two important decisions on the Aids campaign today.

Medical Research

The Committee felt that we now needed to balance the public education campaign with more research into the disease. Until recently, the Medical Research Council has pronounced itself satisfied that no good research projects were being turned down for lack of funds. But they have now come back with a request for a further £1 million in 1987/88 which H(A), including the Treasury, accepted. Although drug companies should do most of the work on Aids, the Committee agreed that the public sector should contribute to basic research and also epidemiological work.

The Medical Research Council also suggested scientists should be brought together in a centrally directed task force to deal with Aids. It is not clear whether this is what free-thinking scientists really want or whether it is merely self aggrandisement by the MRC. The Committee therefore agreed to consider it further.

Sterile Needles for Drug Addicts

The Committee was nervous about this for obvious reasons. On the other hand, the sad fact is that the high rate of Aids amongst drug addicts in Edinburgh does seem to be linked with particular difficulties in getting sterile needles there. The Committee agreed to a limited pilot scheme whereby clean needles will be available in exchange for dirty ones. But, the needles will not be handed out to allcomers. They will only be issued as part of existing work on drug misuse with proper counselling and guidance.

Announcements

These two measures were thought by the Committee to be the minimum acceptable. They will be announced in written Parliamentary answers tomorrow or the day after. They will also be brought together in a press notice which may well receive considerable publicity.

David Willetts

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