

Infected Blood Inquiry

Professor Brian Edwards
22:3:21

“Political and official idiocy”

The inquiry takes evidence from a number of those involved with the various trusts set up to support those who had been damaged by contaminated blood.

Much of the questioning focusses on how independent the Trusts were from the Department of Health, whether they could or should have got involved with campaigning and fund raising and what they did with their reserves.

Jan Barlow the Chief Executive kept her evidence short, precise and business like a style that is later criticised by patient groups.

The Department set up all these trusts and was the primary funder.

They appointed directly some of the trustees and as

we heard earlier guided them on what the funds could be spent on. The Department also set staffing limits. Chairs and Chief Executives had to be careful “not to bite the hand that fed them”. Battles with the Department for funding were conducted in private.

‘... wait as long as possible before resolving the financial difficulties as with any delay more people would die and there would be less to pay...’

We hear about a boardroom row at the Macfarlane trust centred on a letter some members wanted to send to Ministers protesting about potential cuts in budgets at the height of austerity.

Roger Evans chair of the Macfarlane Trust for some years [a former Chief Executive at St Georges Hospital] told the Inquiry that public challenges rarely worked.

There were more subtle ways of putting pressure on ministers to securing additional funding.

Beneficiaries thought that this amounted to appeasement and became very dissatisfied.

He got into a tangle over reserves which he initially thought were the equivalent

of a Departmental credit note.

He eventually conceded that the reserves [at that time around £6m] were held by the various Trusts and invested on their behalf.

Whether to reduce them was a matter for the Trust not the Department.

We hear a little more about planning options for the long term support of beneficiaries which include a final one off payment[circa 100k each] or an insurance based annuity.

According to Roger Evans the Department were initially interested but when they saw the potential sums involved sent the ideas into the long grass.

When Liz Carroll the former Chief Executive of the Haemophilia Society gave evidence we see, opened up, the Societies dissatisfaction, anger and dismay about the Macfarlane Trust and the “too business like “ approach of Jan Barlow the Trust’s Chief Executive.

The Inquiry examines in some detail a major row between the Society and the Macfarlane Trust that nearly led to a very public legal action alleging defamation.

The row centred on what Liz Carroll had reported after a meeting with the Macfarlane Trust.

In her initial version she had claimed that the Chair and Chief Executive of the Trust had told her that the Department would wait as long as possible before resolving the financial difficulties as with any delay more people would die and there would be less to pay.

She retracted this statement when legal action was threatened, against her personally and the Society.

The parties never spoke again.
