

SUBJECT
cc master



File *SH*

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

28 November 1986

From the Private Secretary

Dear Jane

AIDS

The Prime Minister had a meeting yesterday with the Lord President, your Secretary of State, the Minister for Health and Sir Donald Acheson to discuss the problem of AIDS. Anthony Langdon of the Cabinet Office was also present.

The purpose of the meeting was to brief the Prime Minister on the nature of the problem, and the measures which were being taken to combat it. Sir Donald Acheson left behind a briefing pack on which he based his presentation. The Prime Minister was very grateful for the thoroughness of the presentation, and noted particularly:

- (i) that the figure of 30,000 carriers in the UK was subject to up to 100 per cent error;
- (ii) there was no evidence of the existence of the virus in man before 1979, and it seemed likely that it was a mutation of the virus found in green monkeys;
- (iii) there was no cure for the disease, nor was there any vaccination; the difficulties of testing meant that it would be some time before there was any prospect of vaccination;
- (iv) the long period between infection and of becoming ill meant that the number of people developing the disease was steadily rising;
- (v) the disease affected different groups in different countries. In the Netherlands it was not a major problem among drug users, presumably because they have more social support. Compulsory screening is impossible. And other forms of screening were of dubious value since it took 12 weeks for the majority of those infected to show a positive result.

In conclusion the Prime Minister agreed with Mr. Fowler that it was very important to maintain a balance between preventing the spread of the disease, and causing panic. She

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asked that the briefing be circulated as widely as possible,
and that special briefing packs be prepared for the European
Council meeting. She also asked if she could have details of
what other countries were doing about the problem.

I am copying this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord
President's Office) and Anthony Langdon.

Your am

Andy

P A BEARPARK

Miss Jane McKessack,
Department of Health and Social Security