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Mr Bridges, HEF(A)

From Alex Baylis, APS/PS(L)
25 January 1994
Mr Creighton, PS/SoS
Ms Harper, PS/PS(H)
Dr McGovern, PS/CMO
Dr Metters, DCMO
Mr Heppell, HSSG
Dr Skinner, HEF(M)
Ms Christopherson, ID
Mr Cunningham, HEF(A)
Dr Wight, HEF(M)
Mr Knight, HP(A)
Mr Lister, HEF(A)
Ms Kinghorn, ID

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ON CJD - 25 JANUARY

I attach in the following document a letter that has been sent to the editors of the Daily Mail, Daily Mirror and Today newspapers. Although only one 'sample' letter follows (to save paper) the text of all three is identical. The letter was agreed by Mr Soames, MAFF officials and medical and administrative officials within the Department.

I am very grateful to you and your colleagues for their help.

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Cases in which CJD is suspected are now notified to a specially designated unit run by Dr R G Will of Edinburgh. Dr Will is conducting a long term study of CJD funded by my Department. This will examine every known case and naturally will consider possible linkage with the cattle disease, although this possibility is considered to be extremely remote. In July 1993, Dr Will submitted a report to Parliament on the results of his study into the incidence of CJD in the UK, the conclusion of which was that there is currently no evidence of any change in the characteristics of CJD following the advent of BSE. This underlines what a huge distance there is between the latest scientific assessment, and the sort of speculation you reported.

In addition, an expert committee on CJD and similar diseases has been set up under the chairmanship of Dr David Tyrrell to advise the Health Departments and MAFF.

About ten months ago the Chief Medical Officer issued a statement on CJD which after emphasising that there was no scientific evidence of a causal link between BSE in cattle and CJD in humans, said that the "advice issued on 16 May 1990 by my predecessor, Sir Donald Acheson, that beef can be eaten safely by everyone, both adults and children, including patients in hospital, remains valid. The Department continues to monitor developments in this area closely and will carefully consider all new evidence as it emerges. I am confident that all necessary action has been taken to safeguard public health".

I should, as I say, be grateful if you would give this letter the same coverage as was given to your report of the teenage girl's illness. I should be very happy for any of the Department's scientists to brief journalists on CJD if you would find this helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Cumberlege

BARONESS CUMBERLEGE