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HUSH IT UP

Government doctor told gran: 'You must think of the economy'



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belief is proved correct it would be the first known link between the human form of Mad Cow disease and the food chain. And that would devastate the food industry.

Vicky, who is in isolation in a hospital, suffers from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Until now, Government experts have insisted the only way the disease is transmitted is through growth hormones or blood transfusions.

Now Health Department officials have admitted that Vicky could not have caught the disease through known causes.

Baffled

And doctors are baffled by the virus being contracted by someone so young.

Experts advising the Government have consistently denied that CJD was on the increase or that it could be blamed on Mad Cow Disease.

Some scientists believe CJD may be passed on in a way still to be discovered.

But others think that Mrs Rimmer's fears about contaminated food may be right.

Vicky started feeling unwell in May last year.

She began to lose weight drastically.

Then she suffered shaking fits, started falling over and was unable to hold even a cup. Her concentration wandered.

Truth

At first, doctors said nothing was wrong. Then a neurologist was called in for further tests.

Beryl was then told that her granddaughter was suffering from chorea - St Vitus' Dance - which affects the central nervous system and is most common in young girls.

Finally, Beryl was told



HEARTBREAK: Beryl Rimmer claims she was told to keep the news of her granddaughter's plight a secret from the world

the tragic truth. During this harrowing time, she claims, she was visited by a doctor from the Government-established CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh.

The unit was set up three years ago to probe possible connections between Mad Cow Disease and humans.

Beryl said the doctor told her what Vicky was suffering from - and warned her against making her granddaughter's plight public.

"He said 'Think of the economy, think of the Common Market,'" said Beryl.

"He told me Vicky had weeks, maybe a month, to live."

Beryl claims she was then "kept in the dark"

about Vicky's condition. But, from her own research, she is convinced the disease was caused by something her daughter ate.

Other sufferers in this country contracted CJD by being injected with growth hormone from infected corpses.

Wracked

But Vicky has never had any hormonal treatment, transfusions or surgery.

Researchers believe her love of animals could provide a clue.

But they are nowhere

near an answer. Vicky, whose body is wracked by jerky fits, has been kept alive on her drip feed for the last four months.

Grieving Beryl said: "I pray for a miracle."

"But I know that can't happen. I want the doctors to be open about everything that has happened. This is a child's life."

In every other CJD case in this country, Health Department officials could find an explanation which ruled out a link with Mad Cow Disease.

When fears were first

voiced three years ago, they said growth hormone from infected corpses was the source.

Last year, two dairy farmers working with animals with the Mad Cow virus died from CJD.

Blamed

At the time, officials said the victims were elderly and could have caught the illness no matter what they did for a living.

On another occasion last year it was discovered that women had contracted the disease

after fertility treatment.

Again, Ministry scientists blamed the rogue hormone serum.

But now the case of a fit, healthy young girl with no known medical history has drawn a blank.

One theory being investigated is that Vicky may have handled contaminated raw meat.

This could then have entered her blood supply through a cut.

Vicky's story will be told in a Dispatch TV documentary on Channel 4 tomorrow at 8pm.

DEADLY ILLNESS STRIKES BRAIN

THE threat of a mad cow disease epidemic breaking out among people has long been feared.

The human equivalent of the killer illness is Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. It attacks the nervous system and brain, turning it into a sponge.

Within six months of symptoms appearing - they include memory loss and blindness - the victim usually dies.

It kills 20 people a year in Britain but the cause of the illness remains a mystery.

Scientists can find no link between CJD and mad cow disease - bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

A CJD scare broke out after it was revealed that between 1959 and 1985, almost 2,000 passengers were given infected hormone injections.

Infertile women were also given the hormone - extracted from corpses in mortuaries.

A second alert was sparked when it was admitted 12,000 brain surgery patients may have received infected tissue grafts.

And a farmer, whose cattle had mad cow disease, died of CJD in 1992. But the Government dismissed fears of a link.

TOMORROW: Vicky's full heartbreak story

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