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# Haemophiliac deaths 'avoidable'

**The supply of contaminated NHS blood products to haemophiliacs in the 1970s and 1980s was "wholly avoidable", an independent public inquiry has heard.**



Mrs Threakall said warnings had been ignored

Some 5,000 people were exposed to hepatitis C and of these more than 1,200 were also infected with HIV.

Victims, and relatives of some of the more than 1,700 patients who died, have been addressing the privately-funded hearing, due to report in late summer.

The government has said treatments were given in "good faith".

Haemophilia is a rare inherited bleeding disorder in which blood does not clot normally.

Currently, the condition can only be treated by injections of the clotting chemical, known as Factor VIII.

In the early 1970s, patients were treated with blood proteins that came in dry powder form and could then be reconstituted with water - plasma from 10,000 donors went into the product.

The treatment, which often came from patients in the United States who were paid for giving blood, exposed 4,670 patients to hepatitis C infection.

In 1981 it was also found that some plasma products were infected with HIV.

After the mid-1980s the plasma products were treated with heat to kill viruses.

### 'Warnings ignored'

Many of those affected are now ill.

Haemophilia sufferer David Fielding, 51, from Bolton, needed a liver transplant in 1998 after contracting hepatitis C in the late 1970s through the use of Factor VIII.

He told the inquiry he was "appalled" by the treatment he received from the medical profession.

"I cannot be more blunt than that. I hope somebody's got the guts to come here and say sorry," he said.

**"Our community was lied to by the people it should have trusted most"**  
Sue Threakall

Sue Threakall, from north Devon, whose haemophiliac husband Bob died in February 1991, aged 47 after contracting HIV, said: "This terrible tragedy should never have happened in the first place, it was wholly avoidable."

She said her husband had said he did not know what was in factor VIII and was concerned about taking it.

"Warnings were ignored, lessons were not learned and our community was lied to by the people it should have trusted most," said Mrs Threakall.

### Payments

Successive governments have refused to admit any fault but payments of varying amounts have been made to people who caught HIV.

In 2004, the Skipton Fund was set up for those infected with hepatitis C virus but no payments were made to those who died before 2003.

The main purpose of the inquiry, conducted by Labour peer Lord Archer of Sandwell, is to find out why and how the contamination occurred to help those affected come to terms with what had happened.

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Lord Archer, a former solicitor general, said the Department of Health had told him it would help as far as it could and he promised to ask officials for relevant documents.

BBC's Newsnight programme has reported seeing documents suggesting experts were aware of the threat at an early stage, but transfusions were not stopped.

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