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Blood testing following criminal incidents where there is a risk of infection: proposals for legislation

C-Level response via membership consultation

C-Level welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation and is committed to advance the education of the public in Hepatitis C, its causes, treatments and prevention.

We strongly oppose the proposal for mandatory testing.

Prejudice and discrimination is experienced by those affected by Hepatitis C and other blood borne viral infection, we believe that if introduced this legislation will serve to reinforce these prejudicial views.

We fully acknowledge that police officers and indeed anyone else will be anxious about acquiring Hepatitis C infection via assaults but the actual level of risk is extremely small. The figures in the consultation document itself show that only one officer is *thought to have* contracted a blood borne virus in 2003-04.

If this legislation were to be introduced it would not necessarily lessen anxiety and uncertainty as the **applicant** would be required to wait until the 'window period' passed before knowing if they had in fact acquired infection from a viral positive **suspect**. In the case of Hepatitis C this is period is 6 months.

We believe that education is essential to allow applicants to understand the levels of risk to which they may have been exposed.

There are estimated to be between 18,000 and 36,000 undiagnosed cases of Hepatitis C in Scotland, it is expected that the Scottish Executive will aim to address the identification of this population in its Action Plan for Hepatitis C. This proposed legislation may hinder potentially infected people coming forward for voluntary testing because it will enhance the fear of discrimination and stigma.

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Hep C Level is a registered company (Company. No. 224468) and has been recognised as a charity in Scotland by the Inland Revenue Ref: SC 033014