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Ref: BSEparli

Parliamentary

From: Dr H Pickles
Med ISD/3

Date: 9 July 1990

Copy: Mr T Murray
Dr D Harper

"HUMAN BSE": NOTE FOR NO. 10

You asked for briefing for no 10 on the story in Friday's Independent. This refers to an editorial in Saturday's Lancet. A suitable note is attached.

H Pickles

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INDEPENDENT STORY (6TH JULY 1990) ON
"HUMAN BSE" BEING WIDESPREAD

Line to take

Our experts tell us there are only 30 to 40 or so cases in the UK each year of Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD), the human disease similar to BSE in cattle. Calculations that there are thousands of cases are incorrect.

Background

Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD) is a human spongiform encephalopathy and so is in the same family of disorders as the cattle disease, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). The Department of Health is funding surveillance of all UK CJD cases since this should allow detection of any spread of BSE infection to humans, although this possibility is considered remote. Previous careful study in England and Wales demonstrated CJD is a rare disease and we are seeing whether this remains the case. Estimates that there could be thousands of cases are made from biased data and are incorrect, as explained recently by expert witnesses before the Agriculture Select Committee. New techniques have detected genetic abnormalities in one or two families with high rates of CJD-like dementia: these are not relevant to any possible human hazard from BSE nor to the much more common dementia, Alzheimers.