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Possible second case of variant CJD prion protein transmission from blood transfusion in the UK

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A possible second case of transmission of the abnormal prion protein associated with variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) through a blood transfusion in the United Kingdom (UK) was reported by the Department of Health for England on 22 July 2004 [1].

The patient received a blood transfusion in 1999 with blood from a donor who subsequently developed vCJD. The patient died of causes unrelated to vCJD but a post mortem revealed the presence of the abnormal prion protein in the patient's spleen.

The patient was not homozygous for methionine at codon 129 of the prion protein gene, and had not exhibited any signs or symptoms of vCJD before death. In contrast, all of the patients that have been investigated to date have been methionine homozygous at codon 129 . This case provides evidence that people who are not homozygous can still accumulate abnormal prions in lymphatic tissue. Whether non-homozygotes can also develop vCJD, albeit with a longer incubation period, is as yet unknown.

The Department of Health has announced further restrictions on blood donors: the deferral of all potential donors who are unsure if they have had a blood donation, and apheresis donors who have previously had a blood transfusion. Apheresis donors are a small pool of committed donors who make frequent attendances to centres to donate blood, where machine processing removes only certain blood components, and the rest is returned to the donor.

References:

1. Department of Health for England. Update on precautions to protect blood supply. Press release, 22 July 2004. (http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/PressReleases/PressReleasesNotices/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4086160&chk=9/Ni4w) [accessed 29 July 2004]

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