Dear Colleague

GUIDANCE ON DELIBERATE RELEASE OF CHEMICAL/BIOLOGICAL AGENTS

In my letter dated 12 September I reported that while there was no intelligence to suggest any specific terrorist threat to the UK, the possibility of an attack here cannot be ruled out.

British participation in the launch of military operations in Afghanistan on 7 October clearly brings the possibility of retaliatory action of some kind, and as a precaution surveillance and security measures have been reviewed. However speculation in the media that terrorists might use chemical or biological substances as weapons to attack targets in the UK has been further fuelled by news of the Anthrax outbreak presently being investigated in Florida.

Nevertheless it remains the case that there is no intelligence of any specific threat to the UK, but, and as is always the case, the possibility of an attack, whether or not involving the deliberate release of chemical or biological agents cannot be ruled out.

We are currently preparing revised guidance which will be available as soon as possible. This emphasises that the health consequences of any incident should, as far as possible, be handled in the same way whatever its cause. The key current guidance is included in “Responding to Emergencies”, especially Annexes M and P dealing with chemicals and infections.

A deliberate release, however, does need to be managed to ensure the effective co-ordination of a greater number of agencies, and management arrangements differ in some respects. The revised guidance will deal with those elements.

In the meantime, until revised Scottish guidance is available, NHS Boards should refer to that issued in England by Department of Health – “Deliberate Release of Biological and Chemical Agents –
Guidance to help plan the health service response” (March 2000) as a framework for handling such an incident.

Yours sincerely

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