Public health: prevention of AIDS and other communicable diseases, Community action programme 1996-2000

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The Committee called for the required distinction to be made between action on AIDS and action in connection with other infectious diseases. In the case of AIDS, there were a number of specific features (absence of vaccines, problems of confidentiality of screening results, etc.), but the Community was now able to draw on a solid wealth of experience that would enable progress to be made. With other infectious diseases, however, European-level coordination was already in place. It would therefore be the task of the new programme to improve and develop such coordination, pinpointing centres of excellence that were able to perform functions similar to those of the European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS in Paris. Responsibility for circulating information undoubtedly lay in the hands of the national authorities but certain initiatives supported by the Community had proved to be valuable, for example the drawing-up of inventories of existing actions such as the directory of activities carried out by non-governmental organisations in the European Union in the field of AIDS prevention and assistance. The ESC therefore called upon the Commission to speedily prepare and distribute an information booklet in all languages of the European Union and of principal ethnic minorities in order to facilitate access to Community schemes by all interested organisations and associations. With regard to the ‘safety of blood and blood products’, mentioned in points 109 and 110 of the Communication and discussed in points 3.3.3. to 3.3.10. of ESC Opinion 228/94, the ESC reiterated that self-sufficiency was not in itself synonymous with safety. It was pleased that this subject was dealt with in a separate Commission Communication [(1) Doc. COM(94)652 final]. The conclusions to be drawn from an examination of this separate Communication should be translated into specific measures and incorporated in the present programme. The ESC asked to be consulted on this in due course. At the present time Member States already operated an informal network of coordination whenever there was a health emergency, but if such emergencies were to be tackled with greater efficiency a European rapid intervention unit needed to be set up under the programme. Finally, the ESC recommended that the intermediate status report to be forwarded to it should carefully evaluate the feasibility of linking HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases within the same programme.