Tightening and easing blood donor ban over vCJD

Country: Japan
Partner Institute: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), Tokyo
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Current Process Stages

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1. Abstract

Aiming to quell fears of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), MHLW will ban blood donations from people who stayed in Britain (or France) for even a single day between 1980 and 1996. It was not clear when the new ban will take effect, but it might be tightened in May, 2005. However, provisional restrictions have started since March, and the influence has begun to appear in the amount of the blood donation.

2. Purpose of health policy or idea

Because vCDJ could be spread through blood transfusions, health experts decided to implement the ban blood donations from people who visited Britain (or France), even for a single day, between 1980 and 1996, over concerns of the human variant of mad cow disease.

Blood donation from people whose totaling length-of-stay is longer than the following period is limited.

- **A-1** Britain, (France) : 1 day<1980-1996>, 6 months<1997-2004>
- **A-2** Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Portugal : 6 months<1980-2004>
- **A-3** Switzerland : 6 months<1980->
- **B-1** Austria and Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg : 5 years<1980-2004>
- **B-2** Iceland, Albania, Andorra, Croatia, San Marino, Slovakia, slovene, Serb Montenegro, Czech Republic, Vatican, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Malta, Monaco, Norway, Liechtenstein, Romania : 5 years<1980->

**Main objectives**

To prevent the spread of a disorder linked to BSE (on grounds vCDJ could be spread through blood transfusions).
Type of incentives
non-financial

Groups affected
MHLW, Health experts

3. Characteristics of this policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Degree of Innovation</th>
<th>Degree of Controversy</th>
<th>Structural or Systemic Impact</th>
<th>Public Visibility</th>
<th>Transferability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>consensual</td>
<td>marginal</td>
<td>very low</td>
<td>strongly system-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>innovative</td>
<td>highly controversial</td>
<td>fundamental</td>
<td>very high</td>
<td>system-neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Japanese government seems poised to ease its blanket testing of all cattle for BSE.

4. Political and economic background

MHLW had a press conference about the Japan's first case of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) on February 4, 2005.

According to a report released on March 7, 2005 by MHLW, Japan's first vCJD fatality was a Japanese man who died in December 2004. A deceased man confirmed to be infected with vCJD likely contracted the human form of mad cow disease during his 24-day stay in Britain in 1990. He also spent three days in France, where mad cow disease was widely reported, the report said.

(The British government in November 1989 began banning human consumption of beef parts deemed prone to cause the disease, but in 1990 when the man stayed in Britain, "measures taken were insufficient," the health ministry said.)

Ministry officials took a serious view of the fact that his visits had been fairly short, and decided to restrict blood donations from those who had visited either of the two countries for one day or longer.

Those restrictions resulted in blood shortages. Then MHLW eased the restrictions on April 1, 2005. The new restrictions suggested that only those who had traveled to Britain within the designated period would be prevented from donating blood. However, if blood stocks were sufficient, the ban would also apply to travellers who had visited France.

Faced with a possible shortage in the blood supply, Health Minister Hidehisa Otsuji issued an emergency appeal on April 8, 2005, calling on the public to donate blood.
5. Purpose and process analysis

**Origins of health policy idea**
Because of the safety of the transfused patient, the blood donation of the person who has the infectious disease, for example HIV, Hepatitis, and so on, is not admitted. It, vCJD, is similar to these infectious diseases.

**Initiators of idea/main actors**
- Government
- Providers: JRC is responsible for collecting blood donations

**Stakeholder positions**
- MHLW panel released a report about the Japan's first vCJD fatality. The report said he is believed to have eaten such foods as hamburgers and gravy that could have been tainted with BSE. It was judged that the possibility of the exposure when Britain staying was powerful though it was not the one to deny other possibilities completely. Therefore, it came to limit the blood donation from the person who had stayed in Britain etc. in the past to prevent vCJD from spreading by the transfusion.
- Medical workers warned that such a strict ban would have dire consequences for the nation's blood stocks.
- The Japan Red Cross Society (JRC) said that the ban could prevent blood donations from several hundred thousand people and hospital would not have enough blood in store if the ban was implemented. Judging by 2003 transfusion figures, if the percentage of people who had visited the two countries is higher than 4 percent, blood stocks would run short. According to the questionnaire survey that the JRC executed, about 6% had visited Britain or France between 1980 and 1996.

**Actors and positions**
**Description of actors and their positions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MHLW</td>
<td>Japanese Red Cross Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very supportive</td>
<td>very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly opposed</td>
<td>strongly opposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influences in policy making and legislation**
- Restrictions enforced after the first confirmed case of vCJD in February 2005 have had a dampening effect. The nation's stocks of blood for transfusion have fallen 20% below the appropriate level nationwide because of a decline in blood donors. (As of March 18, the amount of stored blood nationwide was 81% of the appropriate level, which is equivalent to an average 3-day supply.)
- Health Minister Hidehisa Otsuji issued an emergency appeal on April 8, 2005, calling on the public to donate blood.
• It was not clear when the new ban will take effect, but it might be tightened in May, 2005.

Legislative outcome

n/a

Actors and influence

Description of actors and their influence

Government

MHLW

very strong

none

Providers

Japanese Red Cross Society

very strong

none

Positions and Influences at a glance

Adoption and implementation

These restrictions are not enshrined into law, and being notified by the collecting blood entrepreneur by MHLW.

These were grandly reported with the television and the newspaper, etc. because of the matter of great importance paragraph related to the people's safeties. Therefore, movement to control the blood donation voluntarily though it had not been enshrined into law yet went out.
6. Expected outcome

- The plan has raised concerns about a potential shortage in the nation's blood banks.
- The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said that the confirmation of Japan's first case of vCJD may not affect Japan-U.S. talks on resuming imports of American beef. (The United States, whose beef exports to Japan have been suspended since a BSE case was confirmed there in December 2003, is calling for a resumption of beef exports.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Health Care Services</th>
<th>marginal</th>
<th>fundamental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Equity</td>
<td>system less equitable</td>
<td>system more equitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Efficiency</td>
<td>very low</td>
<td>very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps, it might be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this blood donor ban. But at least, it was certain to have collected people's attention.

Japan's first discovery of a BSE-infected cow was in autumn 2001. It gave people a very big impact. Similarly, the first case of vCDJ and blood shortage were reported temporary and very sensationally.

People were interested at the moment. However, there is no additional report, and the impact has seemed to become small gradually.

7. References

Sources of Information

MHLW(japanese only)


Newspaper, Magazine, HP

- The Japan Times
- asahi.com

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