

□ INTERVIEW □



Mr. Howard Singleton

whether this activation of the latent virus really does take place as a result of exposure to other viral infection or to vaccines.

If it were clear that sero-positive individuals were at special risk in unhealthy countries or from vaccination, there would be a very strong case for testing, perhaps even compulsory testing. It could be argued in those circumstances that the employer should be certain that an employee was not sero-positive before sending the person to an unhealthy post or requiring vaccination.

Compulsory testing is not the only possibility. We could have a voluntary system under which employees were fully briefed on the reasons why testing might be desirable in their case (including the possibility of participation in 'walking blood banks'), and the employees then would be free to decide whether to be tested or not. Those who

wished to be tested would have to be assured of the confidentiality of the results. There would also have to be a system of professional counselling in place.

The decisions that have to be taken are not easy. The only consideration is the health and welfare of the employees. I can see no reason for testing our employees if the results do not help them to maintain their health. That is the only criterion, in my view.

The whole question of testing is still under discussion between officials of External Affairs, CIDA, the Treasury Board, and Health and Welfare. The foreign service unions have been consulted and there will be further meetings with them before any decision on testing is implemented.

S. G.: Some people think that medical testing by the employer is an intrusion into the private life of the employee. What do you think?

H. S.: Well, of course, there have always been medical tests for other diseases, and some of them are diseases people may be embarrassed about, like venereal diseases, or tests of mental health, and yet these have been required. I don't really think this is in a completely different category. But that being said, you seem to be talking about compulsory testing. I don't think it will come to that, at least not soon, and if the testing is truly voluntary, then I don't think there can be any human rights problems. Even if testing were obligatory, I don't think that testing for AIDS is any more of an invasion of privacy than testing for syphilis or gonorrhoea or tuberculosis.

S. G.: What would be the consequences for someone testing sero-positive, indicating the presence of AIDS antibodies?

H. S.: There might be a few individuals who couldn't accept specific postings. That, of course, is a negative possibility, but there's also the other side. If we send people to places which are especially risky for them, it could shorten their lives, so it's a question of balance.

By the way, there's no intention that a person who tested sero-positive but was still healthy would cease to be an employee. If he developed the full-blown disease and became too sick to work, then that would be another thing. We're not talking about that, but about sero-positive persons who are healthy, and can work like anybody else.

S. G.: Would the Department send sero-positive persons to high risk areas.

H. S.: It's slightly more complicated than that. One thing I'd like to make