

Hepatitis C award linked to Star - The newspaper's series is cited as a reason for a Canadian settlement.

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A \$1 billion settlement for about 5,500 Canadians with Hepatitis C was awarded in part because of evidence uncovered by The Kansas City Star, according to the lead plaintiff.

The Star's series, published in 2003, revealed that the Red Cross and Canadian and U.S. officials knew there was a test that would help prevent Hepatitis C from contaminating the blood supply in 1981. But Canada did not begin testing its blood supply for Hepatitis C until the early 1990s. Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the compensation package last week at a news conference in Ottawa, ending an eight-year legal battle for Canadian Hepatitis C victims. The package covers the 5,500 Hepatitis C victims or the estates of those who have died. The payments will range from \$30,000 to \$300,000, depending on the severity of the illness, which can vary widely. Hepatitis C is a virus that can severely damage the liver. Michael McCarthy, the lead plaintiff who contracted Hepatitis C in a blood transfusion in 1984, said documents obtained by The Star made the evidence irrefutable. "That was gold, those documents,"

said McCarthy who is past vice president of the Canadian Hemophilia Society. "The government's position was not sustainable based on the emerging facts that reliable tests were available. The Kansas City Star played a prominent role in demonstrating those scientific facts."For decades, the Hepatitis C virus had infected the blood supplies of Canada and the U.S. In the mid 1970s, it was believed that more than 300,000 or about 10 percent of all transfusion patients in the U.S. were being infected with the virus each year.The Star found documents that showed in 1981 the nation's top blood experts concluded that U.S. blood collection agencies should begin testing. But the test was delayed here until 1986, and in Canada until the early 1990s.To reach Karen Dillon, call (816) 234-4430 or send e-mail to kdillon@kcstar.com.

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