Another secret file on ME/CFS comes to light

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It is notable that two of the funders of the UK PACE Trial on "CFS/ME" (the MRC and the DWP) have separate secret files on ME/CFS held at the UK National Archives.

Firstly, the MRC files (Item reference FD 23/4553/1) containing records and correspondence covering the period 1988-1997, which are closed for 73 years (ie.until January 2071):

http://tinyurl.com/yfdt8gm

And secondly, the DWP files (Piece reference BN 141/1) which have only recently come to light and refer to "Medical Policy" on ME/CFS, covering the period from 1984 to 1993. They are closed for 78 years (ie. until January 2072):

http://tinyurl.com/2w9gs8z

It is also worth recalling that members of the CMO's Working Group were threatened with having to sign the Official Secrets Act and in June 2000 were issued with a warning that even if not covered by the Act, the status of other documents referring to ME/CFS was "RESTRICTED", a classification that relates to "sensitive issues" and which, if disclosed, might carry a severe penalty. The notification further stated: "Papers not so marked are nevertheless considered confidential....The presumption is that such papers would in due course be made available to the public...but that the timing and means of release should be controlled by the authors...or by the secretariat, as appropriate".

That the Official Secrets Act might have been invoked was confirmed by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, in a letter dated 23rd October 2000 and it is notable that the reasons he gave for protecting information relating to the work of the CMO's Working Group on ME/CFS were that it may be: "confidential information obtained by a Crown servant from a foreign state or international organisation" and "information in the possession of a Crown servant the disclosure of which would impede a criminal process".

The question arises, are there any other illnesses where information is classified for such a long period - the customary period being 30 years, not 78 years? For example, it is known that papers relating to multiple sclerosis are locked away for only 30 years.

What is so secret about ME/CFS that both the MRC and the DWP feel the need to lock away documents relating to this illness?

Further information:

The MRC Secret Files on ME by Margaret Williams, 10 December 2009

http://margaretwilliams.me/2009/mrc-secret-files-on-me.pdf