



Witness Name: Catherine Bristow
Statement No: WITN0378001
Exhibits: Nil
Dated: 17 October 2018

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF Catherine Bristow

I, Catherine Bristow, will say as follows: -

1. Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Catherine Bristow. My date of birth is [GRO-C] [GRO-C] 1949, my address is known to the Inquiry. I have been married for 46 years, with two sons and five grandchildren. I am retired.
- 1.2 I intend to speak about my Infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) and the effect it has had on both my family and myself. I am not legally represented and I am content for my statement to be taken by the Investigators from the Inquiry.

2. How Infected

- 2.1 It was discovered that my infection with HCV was from a blood transfusion I was given when my first son was born by caesarean section in [GRO-C] 1974. I was very ill after the birth and required a transfusion of two pints of blood. It was this blood that turned out to be infected with the virus.
- 2.2 I had Mendelson's syndrome, which was caused by the anaesthetic. I was in Rankin Memorial Hospital from 9th-24th [GRO-C] 1974.

3. Other Infections

- 3.1 I have no other infections. I was tested for HIV and that came back negative. I was aware that I was being tested for this virus.

4. Consent

- 4.1 During childbirth I did not know I was going to have a caesarean section and I do not remember my blood transfusion being mentioned after I came round from the anaesthetic. I was not in a position to give consent to the transfusion.

5. Impact

- 5.1 I had a doctor's appointment in 2010/11 following a period of not feeling my usual self. I'd been experiencing persisting headaches and nausea for a couple of weeks.
- 5.2 I thought it would be wise to have a check up with my GP. I booked an appointment at my doctors' practice, of which I have been a patient of for over 40 years. Little did I know at that stage it was the effects of the blood transfusion dating as far back as 1974, which I was beginning to feel.
- 5.3 Dr [GRO-D] did a set of blood tests to see if anything showed up. I went back the following week, and she explained the liver readings were slightly raised. I felt concerned that there was a problem with my liver. She asked how much alcohol I consumed, to which I replied that I did not drink during the week and would have a few glasses of wine at the weekend.
- 5.4 I was instructed to come back in a month for the blood tests to be repeated; yet the liver results were still raised. She asked about alcohol again and carried out some other tests, of which nothing showed up.
- 5.5 I was referred from Dr [GRO-D] to a consultant at Inverclyde Royal for an opinion. They did not have a resident consultant but I met with a locum. He carried out a physical examination (felt stomach), but everything seemed fine.
- 5.6 After reading through the notes sent from my GP, and asking questions about my lifestyle, he ruled out that it was not alcohol. He too could not find anything and could not

understand why the levels were raised. He thought that it might be 'one of those things' but another set of blood tests was carried out before I left.

- 5.7 It was at this point that the test for HCV was conducted. I did not hear anything about the results, and my GP went on maternity leave, so I presumed everything was fine.
- 5.8 Approximately ten months later (around Easter time) I received a phone call out of the blue from Dr [GRO-D] she was now back from maternity leave and had come across a note from the consultant, which she had only picked up.
- 5.9 She asked if I knew anything about Hepatitis C, I said yes and that I associated the virus with people sharing needles. She then went on to say that she had the results from the consultant and the blood test had come back positive for HCV.
- 5.10 I was shocked at the time, I was not sure how serious the virus was and unsure of the ins and outs of it all. She went on to apologise that it had only been picked up now. For some reason the test for HCV was missed when the blood tests were conducted at the doctors' surgery, it was only done after seeing the consultant.
- 5.11 I was asked to come in for an appointment the following morning. I was looking after my grandchildren at the time, so I phoned my husband straight away to come home from work and discuss the results. I was upset but had to put a brave face on as I had my grandchildren with me.
- 5.12 On reflection, I would have preferred for the doctor to have arranged an appointment to discuss the results, rather than being told over the phone.
- 5.13 During the appointment, Dr [GRO-D] explained that sharing needles was the cause of HCV in most cases, but this was not the case for myself. She asked if I had ever had a blood transfusion, to which I replied that the only time I had been in hospital was for childbirth.
- 5.14 It was concluded that the likely cause was a blood transfusion. She explained all about the virus and was kind in her manner. I was told there was a treatment but it was not very nice. Dr [GRO-D] phoned a specialist clinic at Inverclyde Royal Hospital to make an appointment. I was seen in a couple of weeks, but was left worried.
- 5.15 A sister at the hospital explained there were different strains of HCV, and that I had the worst, Genotype 1.

- 5.16 I went on to have another son in 1979 but there were no problems.
- 5.17 It was recommended that my husband was also tested for HCV. GRO-C I knew that my eldest son was ok because I was given a transfusion after the birth, but as far as I am aware my youngest son has not been tested.
- 5.18 I feel that I was informed well about the infection, apart from the gap where my GP was on maternity leave. Whoever took on her patients should have communicated the results sent by the consultant.
- 5.19 I was tested for HIV but the results were negative. I was aware that I was being tested for HIV.

6. Treatment/Care/Support.

- 6.1 Once diagnosed, I was sent to a specialist nurses unit in Inverclyde Royal Hospital. The consultant said I could start the treatment straight away or wait 5 years. I've often wondered why he said that, why would you wait 5 years with that hanging over your head? I opted to start the treatment straight away to get rid of the virus.
- 6.2 I was made aware that the treatment itself could be severe and that I may also require another blood transfusion.
- 6.3 I become depressed and on occasions felt extremely lousy. The nurses who ran the unit were wonderful, and could not have been more helpful. They provided me with information leaflets and a DVD documenting people's experiences. Sister Anderson said that if I were her mum, she would want me to go ahead with it.
- 6.4 I commenced treatment and coped very well, to which I was surprised, but I would just get on with things as normal. The nurses at the unit would say I was a 'star patient'. There would be days when I was down, but physically I was not too bad. I had 1 injection of Interferon in the week and Ribavirin orally daily. The injections were either in my stomach or thighs; my husband would administer them, as I do not like needles.
- 6.5 It was very precise in regard to timings. I had to take the first medication at 7am and then again 4 hours later. I was also advised to eat food with a lot of fat in to help break down the medication. I do not usually eat that kind of food, so found it

quite hard. By the time of my second treatment, they had discovered that this was not necessary.

- 6.6 If we were going away, we would have to ensure that the Interferon was kept at a certain temperature. On one occasion we were away for the weekend, so we bought a fridge to keep in the car for the medication, which ended up flattening the battery.
- 6.7 The treatment went on for 11 months, and I had to wait a further 6 months to see if it had worked, it was a trial to wait. It did not work. I was particularly low at this point. The nurses at the hospital explained there were good results from a new treatment, and ensured me that I would receive it as soon as possible.
- 6.8 It was still the injections of Interferon and tablets of Ribavirin, but with the addition of a new tablet. That again lasted for another 11 months, but I was not so great the second time round. I had to receive iron injections as my blood level had dropped, and there were days when I was too tired to do anything.
- 6.9 I was tested again after the treatment finished, and received a phone call with the news that it had cleared.
- 6.10 The consultant saw me after the second round of treatment in 2015/2016, and it was confirmed there was no damage to my liver, so I did not have to go back for further check ups.
- 6.11 I had no problems in accessing treatment, as systems were put in place correctly.
- 6.12 The Interferon used to treat the HCV caused thyroid dysfunction, so I am now on medication for the rest of my life. I went to the hospital every two weeks for my medication to be renewed and blood levels checked, it was during one of these 'check ups' that they discovered the thyroid issue. I take Levothyroxine, which can make you feel tired, shaky and lousy. I continue to have blood tests at the health centre regularly to monitor my thyroid.
- 6.13 The treatments did make me feel low, some days I would get depressed and wonder 'what if', but on the whole I feel I coped well. It was looking after my grandchildren that kept me going. Each time you visited the clinic there was a form you would fill in, so the medical staff could recognise if you were starting to get depressed.

- 6.14 Whilst being treated, I used to hope that there would not be a lot of other people in the clinic. There would be people there because of their lifestyle choices, and I would be mixing with those who through choice I wouldn't have. I did not like that at all, but accepted it as 'one of those things'.
- 6.15 The infection and treatment of HCV affected my husband a lot more than I realised, especially because he did not want me to go through what he did. He had a liver transplant 14 years ago, and it was a tough period.
- 6.16 My eldest son took it particularly badly, he felt guilty that it was his fault, but I would constantly reassure him. My youngest son was in a state about it all, and was angrier than I was myself.
- 6.17 The infection with HCV did make me a lot more conscious around my children and grandchildren, I was always very careful with things like separating toothbrushes, but I maintained physical contact with them.
- 6.18 I retired from working in childcare in 2002, so the diagnosis of HCV came after my retirement. There was no impact on my working life.
- 6.19 I was not offered any counselling or psychological support in consequence of being infected with HCV. I may have accepted it if offered.
- 6.20 The nurses were wonderful and you could speak to them about anything, but it might have been nice to speak with someone outside the family, so not to worry them.

7. Financial Assistance.

- 7.1 I never thought about compensation and money, but the nurses (in particular Nurse Anderson) at the Inverclyde Royal hospital encouraged me to apply to the Skipton Fund, to which I did. I initially received a letter back from Skipton (dated 22nd November 2011), stating that my application was declined on the basis that they could not accept my word that I'd had a blood transfusion. I was asked to provide absolute proof.
- 7.2 I attempted to gain access to my medical records from Rankin Hospital, but was told they had been destroyed or lost in the move to Glasgow Hospital. My GP could not find anything in their records either, so there was nothing to which Skipton could rely on.

- 7.3 After going through my records thoroughly, the GP's Secretary found a note explaining that I had a difficult birth by caesarean section, and transfused with 2 pints of blood. I sent this off to Skipton and received a letter back on the 19th January 2012 to state that my first stage claim had been approved. I was still on treatment at this point, and was given a lump sum of £20,000.
- 7.4 I received another letter from Skipton on 15th November 2016, explaining that there would be an additional Stage 1 Payment for those infected in Scotland of £30,000. A further letter on 24th November 2016 confirmed that the payment would be made on or before 22nd December 2016.
- 7.5 On 21st February 2017 I received a letter from Skipton seeking my consent to share data with SIBSS.
- 7.6 Overall, I've had good contact with the Skipton Fund.
- 7.7 I receive no monthly payments and no winter fuel allowance.

8. Other Issues

- 8.1 I would like to know why people who had a blood transfusion were not invited to have a blood test when the government and NHS realised there was a problem with infected blood.
- 8.2 I feel extremely lucky and that my GP persisted with the blood tests after identifying a raised liver reading. I have not been an excessive drinker, so the damage to my liver is pretty negligible.
- 8.3 I do not require anonymity. I have also been asked if I have any other questions for the Inquiry team. The answer is no.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed GRO-C

Dated 17/10/2015