

Witness Name: Zoe White

Statement No.: WITN0902001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 23 May 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ZOE WHITE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 18 March 2019.

I, Zoe White, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Zoe White. My date of birth is GRO-C 1980. My address is known to the Inquiry. I am the eldest daughter of Lynn Foster (W0094) and I regard her partner, Glenn Bowden (W0734), as my stepfather. Indeed, Glenn will officially become my stepfather when he and my Mum get married in August this year. I am married with two daughters (from a previous marriage), and I work full time for Blind Veterans UK. I am severely visually impaired myself.
2. I intend to speak about my mother's infection with hepatitis C ("HCV"). As far as I am able in terms of detail, I will speak about the nature of her illness, how the illness affected her, the treatment she received but in particular, about the impact that her illness has had on her, the family and on me personally. I will also refer to my mother's and Glenn's witness statements (WITN0094001 and WITN0734001 respectively), as they have already described my mother's infection in some detail.

Section 2. How Affected

3. My mother, Lynn Foster, was infected with Hepatitis C through a blood transfusion that she required after giving birth to my younger sister Zara.
4. Zara and I were both born by caesarean section, me in 1980 and my sister in 1984 but my mother was only given a blood transfusion following the birth of my sister at the Royal Bolton Hospital.
5. I had known about the blood transfusion from a very early age, because we were an open family and my mother had told my sister and I about our births before. I used to ask her why she needed a transfusion after my sister's birth, and my mum just told me that it was something that was routinely done in those days in order to bring someone's iron levels back up.
6. As my mother and Glenn have set out in their statements, my mum needed her gallbladder to be removed in late 2009. She underwent this procedure at Trafford General Hospital. Upon recovery from this surgery, the consultant remarked that he had noticed nodules on her liver when he was taking out her gallbladder. He asked my mother whether she liked to drink. When she answered yes, the consultant immediately seemed to decide that she was an alcoholic. He neglected to ask how much alcohol my mum actually drank – she drank socially, but no more than other people. In fact, she has always had a low tolerance to alcohol so has never been a heavy drinker.
7. It had annoyed me, at the time I was told that the consultant had seemingly implied that mum was an alcoholic, but looking back now, his dismissive and flippant manner angers me even more as he could have detected the hepatitis at that stage if he had only thought to investigate further. I still wonder whether my mother would have been spared some of her suffering, particularly with regards to the non-Hodgkin lymphoma that she later developed, if only the signs of hepatitis C had been picked up on then.
7. My mum was diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2010. When she was diagnosed, she dealt with it in such an inspiring and positive manner. She was still always putting other people first, caring for her family and even kept going to work. Because of her positive attitude, I was reassured that my mum would beat the cancer and recover well. She did recover, but it seemed like she kept experiencing further medical complications thereafter, such as depression, gall bladder issues and diabetes.

8. It was not until November 2012 when my mum was finally diagnosed with hepatitis C. This was almost 30 years after she was first infected, and at first she did not tell me about her diagnosis. Even then, she was only diagnosed because she had been to the Breast Clinic to be seen about a swelling under her arm. She was then given a consultation fairly quickly due to her history.
9. After that consultation, we got the devastating news that my mum had non-Hodgkin lymphoma. I could not believe how unlucky my mum seemed to be. I had so many questions – why did she have another cancer to fight? Would she be able to survive the non-Hodgkin lymphoma too? My mum was naturally devastated, but she still put a smile on her face and seemed ready to fight the cancer.
10. My mum did not tell me that she had hepatitis C until shortly after she had started her chemotherapy for the non-Hodgkin lymphoma. I do not recall exactly when this was, but that particular day I had offered to go to Bolton Hospital with her to support her at the appointment. We went into the hospital together, and she asked me to wait outside rather than go into the consultant's room with her. I remember thinking that this was a bit odd, because she usually lets me attend the consultation with her.
11. When we got back to the car in the car park, my mum said that she had something to tell me. I started thinking the worst – was she dying? Nothing prepared me for what she was actually going to say next.
12. My mother told me that the day before she was due to start her chemotherapy, she had been told that the doctors needed to talk to her, and that they had found out that she had hepatitis C.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I do not believe that my mother received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

14. However, I believe that the infection with HCV is responsible for the fact that my mother went on to develop non-Hodgkin lymphoma, cirrhosis of the liver, gallbladder issues and diabetes.

Section 4. Consent

15. As far as I am aware, my mother was not treated or tested without her knowledge or for the purposes of research.

16. With regards to the question of consent, I refer to my mother's statement (WITN0094001) at paragraph 30.

Section 5. Impact

17. When mum told me that she had hepatitis C in the car park, I was completely shocked and devastated. I did not comprehend what was happening, I did not fully understand what I was hearing, and I could not fathom how my mother could have contracted such a disease. I had a million questions to ask her.

18. I then had a sudden feeling of dread, and asked my mum whether there was a chance that I could have HCV, or whether my sister or Glenn could be infected. My mum replied that she did not know, and that we would all need to have a blood test to find out. I then asked whether my father, her ex-partner, would need to be informed and tested. My mum found that question very difficult, as she and my father did not have an amicable split when they separated in 2002, but she agreed that he would need to be tested.

19. My own emotions and fears for myself and my children took over at that point. My mind went into overdrive with worry about how far HCV could have spread within my family. I wondered whether I had it, whether my daughters had it, whether my then fiancé, now husband Pete had it, or even whether my ex-husband had it. I worried about the implications of whether I would have to speak to my ex-husband about this. I felt selfish about having these fears that fixated on my own life and my children's so that I could not comprehend what my mum was feeling, but at the same time I could not help but worry for myself and my daughters.

20. I could not easily speak to my fiancé initially, because he was working abroad at the time, nor could I speak to my sister. My lack of knowledge about hepatitis C led me to fear the social implications of it all too. I was aware that there were so many negative connotations associated with this blood-borne virus. I knew that it was stereotypical of drug abuse and other 'undesirable' lifestyle choices.

21. GRO-C
GRO-C My fiancé was away for some time, but I had to tell him of what we were potentially facing. I was terrified because my sister and I had shared razors with my mum when we were teenagers, and my mum would look after my cuts if I had a fall. I was also extremely anxious that my girls might have cut themselves at their Nana's house when they were little, and my mum could have looked after them but in doing so, also unknowingly infected them with HCV.

22. I can only imagine what my poor mother was going through then, battling cancer on one hand and dealing with HCV and the thought that she might have unknowingly infected her family on the other. It was a very difficult time for us all.

23. GRO-C we were all questioning as a family as to how my mother could have caught such a disease. My mum has always been the most innocent person – she has only ever been with my dad and her current partner Glenn, she has never had a tattoo, she has never used drugs and she has never travelled abroad to any faraway places. We could not understand how she contracted HCV. The only possibility we could think of was when she had the blood transfusion after my sister's birth in 1984.

24. My sister and I started to think back for signs of my mother's illness that we might have missed. My mum had taken my daughters and I to Cyprus that summer of 2012, where my sister was living at the time. I believe it was on this visit that we first noticed that something was not quite right. We saw that my mum had no energy at all – she was sleeping a lot and was just generally weary and tired. She did not have her usual energy and zest about her. However, my sister and I of course did not know that fatigue could be a symptom of HCV. We would never have known to suspect such a thing.

25. It was only after my mum was diagnosed that we thought more about it and realised that my mum's tiredness had been going on for quite a while. I remembered how she would literally fall asleep at random times of the day. My mum had also repeatedly been saying that she felt weary and tired at work. However, as a family we just all thought that she had perhaps been working too hard. We did not for once think that it could be anything serious until the holiday in Cyprus, and even then, we would not have known to suspect HCV.

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 but it was my mum who told me I was clear. I was hugely relieved, but I also felt selfish and guilty that I was so relieved whilst my mum had HCV. I suppose it was my natural maternal instincts to protect my family, in the same way it was for mum with us. I remained conscious of the HCV with my daughters around my mum but otherwise I was finally able to concentrate on helping and supporting her to fight the disease.

27. My mum progressed with the chemotherapy for the non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and I saw her deteriorate quite quickly during that time.

28. Before she became ill, she had been very lively and active. She was always the life and soul of any gatherings or celebrations. She had been thriving in her career, becoming a deputy manager at the Royal Bank of Scotland. She was a well-liked and respected member of staff and a friend to all. She was my best friend and she had always been there for me. Even when she had been battling breast cancer previously, she had been putting me first and helping me get back on my feet with the girls as I had recently gone through a divorce at that time.

29. However, when the aggressive chemotherapy for non-Hodgkin lymphoma started in 2012, my mum lost all of her energy. She still tried to smile, but it was obviously forced. My children noticed the change in their Nana. They were amazing about it, but they naturally had their own fears about what was happening to her.

30. Some days when Glenn had to work, I would go around to see my mum and look after her. I saw her lose her hair, which was heart-breaking for her. She had to find a way to deal with this and explain her hair loss to the grandchildren.

31. Whenever my mum slept during the day, I was fearful of going to check on her just in case the worst had happened and she did not wake up. I used to be paralysed with this fear and dreaded going to check on her sleeping, as I could not bear the thought of losing her.
32. In December 2012, my fiancé and I started to plan our wedding in earnest. He had proposed to me in May 2012, with the intention that we got married in February the following year. This was before we knew of my mother's diagnosis with non-Hodgkin lymphoma or HCV. We then had to plan our wedding around my mum's treatment.
33. Even though she was very ill at the time, my mum still tried to put me first. She spoke to her consultant about when her chemotherapy was going to fall so that she could still walk me down the aisle at my wedding in February 2013.
34. However, her immune system was so low at the time that she picked up an infection over Christmas and had to spend New Year's Eve in Bolton Hospital overnight. She was placed into a small room on a men's ward, which was horrendous for her because she could not feel safe. I was very upset about this and did not want to leave her, because I knew that people would be going into the ward drunk given that it was New Year's Eve. Indeed, someone even wandered into my mum's room late that night. She should not have had to deal with that; it was awful and she should have been home safe with her family.
35. The 9th February 2013 came around, and it was my wedding day. My mother again put me first and tried her best to take part in that morning, but she was clearly tired after just having had chemotherapy that week. Nevertheless, she fought on and got ready; I remember her struggling to get her wig on properly.
36. As we got to the church in the car, my mum's legs gave way and she just could not get out of the car. We had to wait and support her the best we could. Eventually, we managed to get her on her feet and she walked me down the aisle. The whole time that I was stood at the altar, I was holding my mum up by my side. She was so ill, but she bravely kept smiling and never once complained. She was just determined to be as well as she could be.

37. I was so proud of her that day, but I also felt so guilty that I made her go through the exertion of my wedding day when she was so ill. The worry about my mum's health was always on my mind throughout the ceremony and the day as a whole. However, because she was so strong, we all made an effort to enjoy the day as a family and it turned out to be a really good day. Yet, my memory of my wedding day is that I could not fully relax and enjoy the occasion until after she had gone home to rest.
38. This start to my new married life was quite tough. What made matters even more difficult for me was that my husband's work meant that we had to move away to Stafford shortly afterwards. We were about an hour away from my mum. My sister lived even further away.
39. I did not want to leave my mum, and being away from her meant that I lived in constant fear of the thought that I might not be able to get to her in time if something bad happened. I was constantly in touch to check up on her.
40. My mother battled against the lymphoma long and hard. Glenn stayed by her side the whole time and supported her. I know that this was not always easy for him; their relationship faced a tough blow, as he was now her full-time carer.
41. I believe that my mum kept fighting, because she loved her grandchildren so much, and wanted to live to see them grow up. She has always said that her grandchildren are her life. My mum somehow found the strength to survive, and fought off the lymphoma.
42. However, once that was over, she then had to face the HCV. For myself and my family, we always wondered how much more she could live through, how much more she could put up with. We never knew whether a Christmas or birthday would be the last with my mum. We did not know if she would make it through the year. That was the way it has been for us, for years now.
43. The treatment for hepatitis C did not come without serious complications. The hospital gave her drugs which had contraindications and mixed with each other – she was given a combination of drugs which should never have been

administered together, but we did not know this at first. The drugs caused her such confusion that my mum thought she was losing her mind. She could not dress herself, she could not pour a drink, she forgot the year she was born and did not even know what day it was. Thankfully, Glenn and my aunt rushed my mum to hospital in time for her to be treated successfully.

44. I could not get to her in time on that occasion. I did not know until later how severe the danger had been. I had only spoken to my mum on the phone earlier that day. But later, the hospital called me up and told me that I might have to go to the hospital to see my mum. That was when I realised how serious her situation was.

45. Even though my mum contracted HCV in a completely innocent way, she has still had to endure the looks from people in the clinics. She was once in the same waiting room as someone who was in handcuffs with police officers around them. She was made to feel shameful, dirty and embarrassed by something that was not her fault.

46. The last few years have been a long battle for my mum. Even though she has now thankfully cleared hepatitis C, she still suffers from the lasting effects of it. The illness has changed her quality of life, her dreams, her goals and her future.

47. She had always dreamt of going to Las Vegas for her 60th birthday, but instead had to spend it in her back garden because she was just not well enough to travel.

48. Mum had to take early retirement, instead of retiring from her job at the time that she would have wanted. She was also unfairly treated by her employers.

49. She does not have the same energy or zest anymore. She might have some good days where she will do more activities, but she will be completely wiped out the next day and have to spend it in bed. She tires very easily.

50. She can no longer join in and have a celebratory drink with the family.

51. She worries all the time that any new aches and pains she gets is related to cancer, or something even worse. She cannot have a transplant, which is not fair and exacerbates the feeling that the next bad thing that happens will finish her off. She spent her savings a few years ago, thinking that she would not live long enough to use them otherwise. She is constantly thinking that something else bad will happen to her.
52. I feel that dread with her too. I dread her calling me after every appointment that she has, in case she tells me something bad has developed. I still feel like I am on permanent stand-by, waiting for a phone call to tell me that I need to rush to hospital if I want to see my mum in time. At the same time, I have to know how her health is, and I always check with her that she is telling me everything, just in case she is trying to shield me from any bad news.
53. My mum has always just got on with things and dealt with whatever has come her way. She has always fought so hard. But now, I believe she is sick and tired of going to the hospital for appointments. She has even said to me that she feels like she is taking up too much of the hospital's time. Typical of Mum, thinking of others.
54. She has gone through all of this, supported by all of us as best we could, but still alone in her struggles because of course none of us could really understand what she was going through. Yet, she has never complained to any of us about it.
55. The effect of her illnesses have been devastating on everyone around my mum. My mum lives for her family, her grandchildren especially. They adore her and we are all very grateful that she is still with us, as she is such a kind, caring, loving partner, mother and Nana. However, we are all aware of what she has gone through and how it has changed her.
56. I believe that it is only recently that my mum has been coming to terms with what has happened to her. She has only just started talking about it. She was on antidepressants for a while, which she felt saved her. But the antidepressants did not allow her to cry or deal with her emotions; I think she thought that if she cried, she would just completely open the floodgates. She also of course wanted to put on a brave face for the benefit of the rest of us.

She is a lovely woman, but I feel it is sometimes to her detriment because she will always put others first.

57. The effect of my mum's illness on my sister has been particularly profound. My sister has only recently confided in me about the guilt she feels: she bottles her emotions up, so telling me about her unfounded guilty feelings took a lot of courage for her. My sister thinks that if she had not been born, my mother would not have had to go through all of this. I was not aware that my sister felt this way for such a long time. I, of course tell her that it most definitely is not her fault and that she should not think that way but I don't think it makes any difference. To think that my sister has been living with this guilt and still does is a heart-breaking realisation for me.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

58. As far as I am aware, my mother has never received counselling or psychological support in relation to being diagnosed with HCV.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

59. I believe that my mother received the Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments from the Skipton Fund.

Section 8. Other Issues

60. I feel so sad for my mum that she has had to go through all of these struggles. It was pure bad luck on her part that she contracted this disease. I want people to know what happened to my mother, so that she did not suffer in vain. I want recognition and acknowledgement of what happened, so that my mother no longer feels like she has to suffer in silence, unable to tell anyone what is happening due to the stigma of HCV. I do not want people making unfounded judgements of my mother.

61. I have tried my best to describe the impacts of the HCV on my mum in this statement, as I want people to understand what happened, but in truth, I feel like I have barely scratched the surface.

62. It is not fair that my mum has had to endure so much in the last few years – lymphoma, cirrhosis, gallbladder problems, fatigue, chemotherapy – when I believe it could have been avoided in the first place. I have more recently learned about the contaminated blood coming from high-risk donors in America being paid for their blood, such as prisoners and drug addicts. The government should not have imported this blood and taken this risk with my mother's life.

63. For everything that Mum has gone through and continues to go through, for all that we as a family have been through, and continue to go through, we are fortunate that we still have her. There are thousands of families that cannot say the same.

64. I would like this Inquiry to find out how this scandal, that has affected thousands of people just like us, was allowed to happen. Who knew what and when. It is not compensation money that we are looking for but recognition for the years of angst, a proper apology for what everyone has been put through and to prevent anything like this to ever happen again.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 23/5/2019