

Witness Name: Susan Gardner

Statement No: WITN2905001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SUSAN GARDNER

I, Susan Gardner will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Susan Gardner. I was born on GRO-C 1947 and I live at GRO-C
GRO-C Warwickshire, GRO-C
2. I am married and live with my husband. We have one child together.
3. My husband, John Gardner, has also produced a witness statement 'WITN2904001' for the Inquiry.
4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

Section 2. How Infected

5. On the GRO-C 1988 I gave birth to my son at Walsgrave Maternity Hospital (WMH) in Coventry. I lost a lot of blood and required a blood transfusion. I believe at this point I was infected with Hepatitis C (Hep C).

6. My consultant at the time was Mr Santcassia. I only ever had one blood transfusion in my life which was given to me as an emergency.
7. I was not provided with any information or advice beforehand about the risk of being exposed to infection through the blood transfusion.
8. In the early 2000s when I first started to feel poorly, I went to the GP and he requested a blood test. The results came back stating that I had glandular fever. I then had another blood test as I was still poorly and the results stated that I had rheumatoid arthritis. In 2004, I had my spleen removed as I looked bruised without even knowing what impact my spleen was having to me. I had been poorly for years and I could not understand what was going on and why I was receiving different test results and unable to get a diagnosis for the symptoms that I was suffering.
9. It was not until Dr Perkins at the George Elliot Hospital requested that I have a blood test for Hep C that I had the test. This was the time that I found out that I tested positive for Hep C. I was just told about the results verbally. I was not given any information at this time. I was not provided with a letter or any paperwork to state what it was and how it would affect me. When I was told that I had Hep C, it was like a bombshell. I so shocked and confused.
10. I was then referred to a liver specialist, GRO-D at GRO-D GRO-D. However, I had to wait for 6 months for funding to be confirmed before I could see GRO-D and be treated. When the funding was in place, I finally got an appointment with GRO-D. I was not provided with any information at this time, he just reiterated to me that I had Hep C and made a further appointment to see me.
11. At the start, my husband and I were not provided with any information about Hep C. However, when I had my second appointment with GRO-D he explained top to bottom what Hep C was.
12. I believe that information should have been provided to me earlier. I believe as a result I infected my husband with Hep C. My husband was told after giving blood to a blood bank that he had the infection but it cleared by itself.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I do believe that I have contracted any other infections other than Hep C.

Section 4. Consent

14. I believe I was not told of the risks involved with Hep C.

15. I believe that I was not provided with adequate information.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

16. I suffered mental effects as a result of the infection. I now suffer from brain fog and depression. I am on anti-depressants and to this day, I cannot go out without someone being present with me. I have lost my independence because of the infection.

17. I also suffered physical effects as a result of the Hep C. At the time, I had back pains, body aches and I was very lethargic. I lost my appetite and lost weight as a result. I can now relate the above symptoms to the infection.

18. As a result of the Hep C, I believe that I have suffered further medical complications and conditions. My gallbladder and spleen had to be operated on.

19. Approximately a month after meeting with GRO-D in relation to my second appointment, I was offered Ribavirin and Interferon treatment. I was told that the course was for 6 months. However, whilst I was on the treatment it had terrible side effects, which I told the doctors about. A consultant, Dr Freshwater, wanted me to stop the treatment when I only had 1 or 2 weeks left. However, GRO-D said he was going to take a gamble with me and asked me to finish the treatment. Unfortunately, after 6 months, I was told that the Hep C had not cleared which was very upsetting for me as I went through all that suffering for no reason.

20. Another doctor at the hospital said that I only had 1 or 2 years until there was a possibility that I would require a liver transplant as my liver would not be

able to take it much longer and that I would have to go on the liver transplant waiting list.

21. In or about 2016, I was asked to go on a trial treatment, which came from the USA and I was one of 64 people to go on the trial. Unfortunately, I cannot remember the name of the treatment but it was a 3 month course. I was very lethargic whilst on this treatment but the side effects were not as bad as the first treatment. Thankfully this trial treatment cleared the Hep C. It has been 3 years since I had the treatment and I have been told that there is no sign of Hep C.

22. I do not know what other treatments were available at the time and I just went with what the doctors recommended or suggested.

23. The Ribavirin and Interferon had a mental and physical affect on me. I had no energy at all. My mobility was restricted and I found it very difficult to walk anywhere. I was so drained that I felt like I was going to faint. I could not even respond to people who came home to visit me. At the time, my husband would try and talk to me but I would not respond, I would just stare at him like I was in a daze. I suffered from depression and as a result I was given anti-depressants tablets. I lost a lot of hair and as a result my hair went thin. I just wanted to close my eyes and sleep as I was so exhausted and drained.

24. The infection impacted on the treatment I received for my knees. I was due to have an operation to have knee replacements but the doctors at George Elliot Hospital would not do it. I was then sent to the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham to have it done. This delayed matters for me.

25. The infection has also impacted me physically, mentally and emotionally in my private, family and social life. As previously stated, I do not like to go out anymore without someone being with me. I do not know the reason for this but my social life has definitely been impacted on as a result of what I went through.

26. At the time, there was a stigma attached to Hep C. People did not know much about it and were asking the doctors at the time whether Hep C could be passed on easily. This started to play with my mind.

27. My son was also impacted. He was only 12 years old when I was diagnosed. My husband and I just gave our son enough information for him not to ask any questions. It was quite difficult for us as I had to constantly be careful around him and had to make sure that he did not use anything that I used, such as towels. Being a mother, this was very hard for me.

28. My husband worked for Rolls Royce for 40 years before I was diagnosed. After the diagnosis he left Rolls Royce and worked for the Royal Mail so he could work flexible hours. He worked full time, 40 hours a week but after I became poorly, he cut his hours down. After I became very ill, he went down to working only 18 hours which was just 3 days a week. My husband was the main breadwinner at home and we had a young son to provide for, but as a result of the Hep C, he found it difficult. My husband could have continued to work full-time had it not been for the infection.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

29. I was not provided with any counselling or psychological support and neither was my husband. I believe it would have helped us both if we were offered the treatment.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

30. I received the Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments from the Skipton Fund approximately 5 years ago. In total I received £50,000.

31. I also received a third payment from the Skipton Fund which was a top up of approximately £20,000.

32. GRO-D told us about the Skipton Fund after seeing me and he made the application for me.

33. I currently receive £18,000 a year (£1,500 monthly) from EIBSS. The payment started not long after we received the lump sum payments from the Skipton Fund.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

34. I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

35. I do not want to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed. GRO-C

Dated 27.03.2010