

Witness Name: Rebecca Melanie Gilray

Statement No: WITN2908001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: MARCH 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF REBECCA MELANIE GILRAY

I, Rebecca Melanie Gilray will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Rebecca Melanie Gilray of [GRO-C] I was born on [GRO-C] 1980. I currently run my own business in publishing greeting cards, but I am currently on maternity leave. I am married and have two kids, [GRO-C]
2. I make this statement in relation to Mr David Stephen Tomkinson, my late father who was born on [GRO-C] 1959 and sadly passed away on 12 April 1987, aged 28. He was infected with HIV as a result of having received contaminated blood products.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late father's full medical records.

Section 2. How infected

4. According to my mother, my father suffered from severe Haemophilia A. He was diagnosed when he was two years old. He had bitten his tongue and had to go into hospital as the bleeding would not stop.
5. The hospital where he was infected was St James Hospital in Leeds. My father was under the care of Dr McVerry and Dr Swinburn. When he was young, my father was initially treated with Cryoprecipitate and then Proliferate followed by Factor VIII BPL. Once his treatment was changed, he was given Factor VIII constantly, in hospital and at home. I have spoken to my grandparent's about my father's treatment for his Haemophilia. I have been advised that they do not recall being told that his treatment was changing to Factor VIII or the risks associated with using Factor VIII.
6. In 1985, my father received a letter in the post stating that if he experienced anything unusual with his health, he should get in touch with Dr Swinburn. Following that, my father started experiencing nose bleeds which he could not control. He was not feeling right and was getting constant colds as well as rashes on his body and legs. He consequently went to see Dr Swinburn and Dr McVerry who ran some tests on him. It took four weeks for the hospital to receive his results after which my parents returned for a consultation. It was confirmed that my father had been infected with HTLV 3 (later called HIV).
7. When my parents found out, my mother was three months pregnant with my sister, Helen. My mother tested for HIV and thankfully tested negative.
8. I was not present at the appointment in which my father was told, but my mother has informed me that my father was not given enough information to help manage his infection. Not once was it ever mentioned that my father's conditions were caused by contaminated blood products. They were told that they should use protection if they had intercourse and that they should keep all of his belongings separate to ours. My mother was told that if my father

was ever bleeding or cut himself, she should not try to help him. I do not think any treatment was discussed immediately either, though he was attending the hospital regularly for blood tests to monitor his condition.

9. I believe that information should have been provided immediately after the doctors discovered the risk of the infection, but instead the hospital staff insisted that they did not know what was going on.

10. In his lifetime, no member of our family was informed that my father suffered from Hepatitis B, however after he passed away, we found out that he was also diagnosed with Hepatitis B.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. I do not believe that my father had any other infections besides HIV and Hepatitis B.

Section 4. Consent

12. I believe that my father was tested without his knowledge, without his consent, and without being given adequate or full information.

13. My father was on treatment for HIV and had to switch between so many different types of tablets. I am not a medical professional, so I cannot say for certain, but it is only now that I can see that they were changing his tablets without much thought being given. Sometimes my father was put on a particular drug for only one week and then it would be changed again. Surely that is not enough time to evaluate whether a drug is beneficial. Furthermore, I feel as though my father had to endure several different treatments and procedures which all seemed unnecessary and excessive. For example, he had to have radiotherapy, bone marrow transplants and lumbar punctures but none had any benefit to him. It seems as though they were experimenting on him to see what worked. He also had countless blood tests and I do not believe that there was any need for that many. I do believe that he was treated like a guinea pig.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

14. Although I was only six years old at the time, I remember my father's illness clearly as I would often help him. There were times when my mother would be at work and my father would have a bleed at home. I had to help him clean up not knowing what I could have been exposed to. Often he would bleed and I would be told not to go near him. I was told not to use anything he was using. I remember one time he dropped a drill on his foot and I had never seen so much blood in my life. He had to teach me what to do and how to do it. At a very young age, I learnt how to call an ambulance and how to cope with such a horrific condition.
15. I was in school when my father was very ill and I would never know who would pick me up or what would happen. During his treatments and his hospitalisation I was severely limited on when I could see my father. One day he would be at home, albeit ill, then gone the next. I would never know when he would go to hospital. Even when he was at home, my father looked ill.
16. My father would often cry his eyes out at home and in hospital. He could not bear to be around us. He would go away to clear his head and I cannot imagine how lonely that must have been for him. I would try to spend as much time with him as possible and would try to comfort him when he was crying. I would cuddle him on the sofa and would stay up past my bedtime just to spend a little more time with him. We would play together and he would cook us a lot of deserts. At the time, the area we lived in was not all safe. If we went out and were returning home, as we were passing a high rise block of flats, beside a window he would stand waiting for us and would wave cheerfully. When I pass that place now, I still picture my father standing there.
17. My father had a lot of illnesses all which are attributable to HIV. He had constant colds, pneumonia, cold sores and never ending nose bleeds. My mother informed me that the hospital did not know those symptoms were onset by HIV and could never understand why he was not recovering.

18. In 1985, my father was diagnosed with Non Hodgkinson's Lymphoma in his neck, though they never mentioned how bad it was. Since he had bandaging on his neck, I was not allowed near him for fear of the infections spreading to me. They put my father on chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I remember this as mother used to call him Kojak as he had lost his hair during chemotherapy. My father went through phases where he was emaciated and phases where he would binge eat. This would result in vomiting. At times he could not get out of bed, he was despondent.
19. My father and the doctors had many arguments about his treatment. The doctors denied that he was ill and ignored his symptoms so he was refused certain drugs that would slow down the HIV. As I have mentioned, they changed his medication on countless occasions.
20. I have heard from my mother that the hospital was very hostile towards my father. He was admitted in wards where everything was disposable including cutlery and bedding and any member of staff would dress as if he was contagious. My father was not permitted to go to the toilet and his room was completely isolated.
21. Towards the end of his life, we practically lived at the hospital. I knew the staff by name, they would feed us and we would have dinner with them. On the day he passed away I had been at the hospital. I wanted to see my father when we were told that he was dying, but the doctors refused to allow me in. At that point I stopped talking completely – I was diagnosed with selective mutism. It was very scary for me. My entire family was standing around my father and nobody could stop crying. He was gone and we understood that, but nobody understood why he had died.
22. After I was diagnosed with selective mutism, I was counselled by a child psychologist. At some point I must have started talking again though my memories of these sessions are hazy.
23. As time went by I developed anxiety. I believed that everybody around me would also die and feared that if I lost my mother, nobody would be there to

care for me and Helen. After losing her husband, my mother did not cope very well. I feel as though I became her scapegoat as she would vent all her frustration and anger out at me. I also had to raise Helen myself. Looking back, as I now have a husband and children of my own, I can understand why my mother reacted like that towards me; however at the time I was always questioning why it had to be me.

24. When I came home from school, although it was not a secret from us, there was still a secretive vibe. I did not know my father had HIV until shortly after he passed away as my father did not tell anyone. Only my grandparents, my mother and uncle knew. When I was a child, I had seen an advert on BBC news about AIDS and I quickly figured out that that had killed my father. Of course I asked my mother about it, but she told me not to be silly.

25. I knew that there was a massive stigma attached, especially given the manner in which my mother spoke of it. Prior to my late teens, only one of my close friends knew of what had happened to my father. During secondary school I was attending a PSHE lesson in which they were discussing sexually transmitted diseases. It felt like I was being smacked in the head and I was so overwhelmed by the contents of the class that I burst into tears. I felt silly as I knew that my father could not have done any of the things they were saying. At that moment, my classmates found out what happened to my father.

26. Keeping it concealed for such a long time worsened my anxiety and I felt as though I was betraying my father's memory, as though I was giving up on him, but it was easier to hide it than trying to explain the truth to people. It was frustrating hearing the potential methods of transmission in that PSHE lesson. The teacher said STD's could spread via cuts and through using the same toilet seat. I knew that this was inaccurate as it was a lot harder than that to pass it on. I had read up an awful lot about it myself over the years. People also instantly jumped to the conclusion that those infected with blood borne diseases were homosexuals.

27. To this date, I still suffer from anxiety. I am anxious that my mother and children will die. I am a low clotting carrier of Hemophilia and I am so

frightened that my children will grow up with the dreadful condition and that the same thing would happen to them. My husband has a fear of needles and so I cannot imagine him being able to cope with his son being a haemophiliac.

GRO-C
GRO-C

As a result, I have become very protective of my children.

28. I have a therapist whom I have been seeing for cognitive behavioral therapy for twelve years. The first thing I was asked was if I had suffered from childhood trauma and whether I had considered that my anxiety stemmed from there. I do not go regularly, but whenever I feel I need it, I go and it does help. I also suffered from post natal depression after giving birth [GRO-C] as I feared he would be a Hemophiliac and would die too. I often feel silly for having these thoughts as I consider myself an intelligent person.

29. We almost lost our family home as result of losing my father. My mother would take us to eat at the hospital as she could not afford to feed us. She had to rely on my grandparents to help us financially. They would drive thirty mile round trips to the hospital bringing us food. My aunty stopped her GCSE's to look after me and my sister [GRO-D]

GRO-D

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

30. My father got no support whatsoever. If anything, he was spoken to like a child and as if he did not understand anything.

31. As I have mentioned in the above sections, I have received psychological support and counselling.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

32. My father only ever received sick pay.

33. My mother received £46,000 from the MacFarlane Trust which was conditional on signing a waiver, though she did not understand what she was signing, nor did she understand the implications.

34. I received £7,000 [GRO-C] Our money was put in a trust fund until we came of age. My grandfather thought that it was unfair for me to receive [GRO-C] The Fund's reasoning was that I was older and would therefore be entering adulthood sooner than my sister so I would not need as much money. The monies were only available to get us through our education. After we turned eighteen, they sold the bonds and gave the remainder to us in cash.

35. I was not involved in the application process though I have heard from my mother that she had to send the Trust my father's death certificate. She found the process very onerous, demanding and time consuming. Any time she needed a grant she would have to risk purchasing things not knowing if they would refund her the money.

Section 8. Other Issues

36. I cannot help but think that we were robbed of our father and that he missed on his daughter's lives and now his grandchildren's too. Mostly I want to know why they deliberately infected him. Was it a lottery for them? Did any of them know the risks and if so, did they ignore them?

37. My uncle David passed away from Hepatitis C and so my aunt has signed me up to a lot of campaign groups and societies. I do not like reading the Facebook pages or magazines as it makes me feel very bitter. As I suffer from anxiety, I prefer to remain as positive as possible and I cannot risk channeling anger back into myself. I have also heard comments that people like me should not be involved in the Inquiry as I was not his partner, but he is still my father and I believe very strongly that I should have my say as much as any wife or husband.

38. When I first met my husband I told him about my father and he asked why nothing had been done about it. My answer to him was that we just did not know where to begin that battle as it was like looking at Mount Everest, not knowing how to get there. The announcement of the Inquiry has provided me with some reassurance and I hope that maybe, finally, something can be done about it.

39. When my father was in hospital, on his ward there were four men. Out of those four, only my father passed away. I would like an explanation why it was my father who passed away so quickly and aggressively. Some people were contaminated in the 1970s and are still alive today. I strongly suspect that my father was constantly being treated with contaminated blood products which worsened his condition and sped up its progression.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

40. I do not wish to remain anonymous. I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

41. I am happy to give oral evidence if required.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed. GRO-C

Dated 29/3/19.