

Witness Name: Stephanie Jane Whyte

Statement No.: WITN2987001

Exhibits: None

Dated: 26th July, 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE JANE WHYTE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the inquiry Rules 2006 dated 25th March 2019.

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Stephanie Jane Whyte. My date of birth is GRO-C 1969 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a catering assistant at Carlisle College, Cumbria. In this statement I intend to speak about my husband Andrew Whyte and his infection of hepatitis C. In particular how he was infected, how the hepatitis C virus affected him, the treatment he received and the impact it had on him and on me and our family.
2. I met Andy when I was fourteen years old, we have been together for thirty five years. Andy and I have two sons together. Andrew who is thirty two years old and Nicky who is thirty one years old. We are a very close family and now have three grandchildren. Andy and I are soulmates, he is my best friend and the love of my life.

Section 2. How Affected

3. When I met Andy he enjoyed boxing and playing rugby. He told me that he

had an operation on his nose at the City General Hospital in Carlisle in 1983. He was still having nasal problems when I met him. Two years after we were married in 1988 he had another operation on his nose at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle. This would have been on 9th June, 1988. I remember going to visit him the day after the operation and his face was really swollen, he looked like he had been in a car crash. I remember I was really shocked to see him looking like that. I remember Andy saying that during the operation the medical team had struggled to stop his nose bleeding and that he received Factor VIII during both his operations in 1983 and 1988, due to the large amount of blood he lost. It is from one of these operations that he received contaminated blood and contracted hepatitis C.

4. I do not believe that Andy was given any information prior to his operations that the products he received could be contaminated. He certainly wasn't told that he may get hepatitis C or HIV.
5. In 2006 when Andy returned from holiday I noticed straightaway that he looked jaundiced. He complained of feeling very lethargic and generally unwell. I remember he went to see a doctor at our local practice. This was Brunswick House Practice, Brunswick Street, Carlisle. I don't know the name of the doctor that Andy saw.
6. A few weeks after his appointment Andy told me that his doctor had said that his blood results had shown that he had hepatitis C. I didn't know what hepatitis C was then. Andy made out that it was just a mild infection that would clear. Neither of us knew it was a serious condition.
7. Andy did not tell me that the infection could be passed on to others. This was because he wasn't told, it could be passed on. If Andy and I had known the infection could be passed on we would have taken all the necessary precautions.

Section 3. Other infections

8. I am not aware of Andy developing any other infections from the blood other than hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

9. I do not know if Andy was treated or tested without his knowledge or consent. From being told that he had hepatitis C, everything happened so quickly with hospital admissions and bloods been taken from him. It is possible he was tested without his knowledge but I am unable to confirm this for sure.

Section 5. Impact

10. The impact of Andy contracting hepatitis C was profound on our family. Up until Andy was diagnosed, he was a fit and healthy man. Physically, he was strong, but then he began to lose a lot of weight. Although he lost a lot of weight, I remember his legs and stomach became swollen, so much so, he couldn't fit into many of his clothes. I had to go out and buy him plus size trousers. Mentally, he became a different person, he was always happy go lucky and would do anything for anyone. He became very depressed and didn't want to go out and see anyone. He became very verbally aggressive with me and our boys. We would all walk about on eggshells when we were around him, he was so short tempered.
11. I remember Andy being admitted to Carlisle Infirmary for a few days for tests. This would have been in 2006. He had already been told by his doctor that he had mild hepatitis. I don't know what ward he was on, but I remember he discharged himself. He appeared to be on a ward with patients who were mentally ill and he felt very uncomfortable. He said the doctors had told him that he had been drinking too much alcohol and that it had damaged his liver. Andy was a social drinker, so we both found this very hard to believe.

12. Andy was prescribed medication, I do not know what it was but he had to take a lot of pills that made him very ill. Whilst on the pills he would just lay in bed. He was exhausted all the time. I remember I read the information leaflet that came with the pills. It said that they shouldn't be taken if you had liver disease. Andy made an appointment to go back to see the doctor at Carlisle Royal Infirmary. I had to take him as he physically was not strong enough to drive. Andy explained to the doctor that the pills he had prescribed him were making him feel terrible and that it said on the label that they shouldn't be taken by someone who had liver disease. I remember the doctor took the pills from Andy and threw them in the bin and said "*we will put this down to experience*". Andy became angry with the doctor and told him he had no confidence in him and that he was going to go to the Freeman Hospital at Newcastle.
13. We both left and I drove Andy through to the Freeman Hospital. Andy received a phone call as I drove out of the car park of the Carlisle Infirmary. When he came off the phone, he told me that the call was from a doctor at Freeman Hospital giving him directions on where to go when we arrived. Clearly the doctor who we had seen at Carlisle Infirmary had contacted the doctor at Freeman Hospital to tell him we were on our way.
14. The next few months' right up until when Andy had his liver transplant, was probably the most stressful period of my life. They kept Andy in hospital and I was driving backwards and forwards to Newcastle every day, sometimes I would sleep in the car. At the time I was working for Andy, doing booking keeping and accountancy to support his business. I was trying to work at home when I got in after commuting to the hospital. I was totally exhausted, my own life was just on hold. It was also costing me a fortune in fuel getting to and from the hospital.
15. When we were told on 16 June 2007 that a liver donor had been found for Andy it was a bittersweet moment for me. I was happy because I knew that without one, Andy would die, but at the same time I was frightened that something would go wrong. I stayed in a flat at the hospital the night before

Andy's operation but I didn't sleep a wink, I was so frightened.

16. After Andy had recovered from his operation, I remember we saw a Professor Bassendine at Freeman Hospital. She told us that Andy would have contracted hepatitis C from being given contaminated blood products during the operations on his nose. She offered him treatment for the hepatitis C as the hepatitis was attacking his new liver. This would have been in 2008.
17. I believe the treatment lasted a year. In this time Andy had to inject himself in the stomach and once a week I would inject Andy in his arm. We had to go every week back to Freeman Hospital for Andy to be checked over. I do not recall the name of the treatment Andy received. He was on this treatment for twelve months. He was told after four months that the treatment had been successful and he was clear of the infection. He still had to complete the course.
18. This treatment had a terrible effect on Andy. Physically he lost a lot of weight and looked really ill. He was always so tired and was either lying on the couch or in bed. Mentally, his mood was very low. He was very hard work to be around, very short tempered and irritable. It was a difficult time for my sons also who both left home. My eldest son, Andrew went to live with a friend and my younger son went to live with my sister. It was a very difficult time for me as well. I felt torn between my boys and Andy. At one stage because of Andy's mood swings, I even contemplated leaving him. I even put my name on the housing association list. I didn't think our marriage would survive. Since Andy had his transplant and cleared the hepatitis C infection his health has improved. Nevertheless we were told that by having the liver transplant it would prolong his life by ten years. It has been thirteen years ago now and so we both feel that he is living on borrowed time. This knowledge affects us both mentally.
19. Andy and I became aware about the stigma attached to hepatitis C. It is associated with homosexuality and intravenous drug use. The stigma didn't

really bother me, although I didn't broadcast Andy's infected status.

20. At the time that Andy was diagnosed with hepatitis C and liver failure, he had built up a very successful business. I worked in the business doing the bookkeeping. We were comfortably well off. Andy became so ill that he could no longer work and the company folded. Andy went on to benefits and we struggled financially. We used all our savings to survive and I ended up having to get a job so our family could survive.

Section 6 Treatment Care Support

21. Neither Andy nor I received any counselling or psychological support. I think I may have benefited if some had been available. It could have helped me cope better with Andy's mood swings. I didn't realise that the side-effects of the treatment he received could be so severe.

Section 7. Financial assistance

22. Andy and I have never received any financial assistance. I remember Andy had seen something on the television about people who had been given contaminated blood receiving compensation. It was for people who had been infected with Hepatitis C and HIV from the contaminated blood. I cannot remember when this was but I know he contacted Thompsons solicitors in Glasgow. I remember Andy had to get his medical records and this took many months. Eventually Andy was told he was not entitled to compensation as he had not met the criteria. I cannot comment about the payments people who have been infected are receiving as I do not know the amounts of money involved.

Section 8. Other Issues

NOT RELEVANT

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 16-3-20