

Witness Name: Helen Stafford

Statement No: WITN1981001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 5/2/19

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF HELEN STAFFORD

Section 1. Introduction

1. I Helen Stafford will say as follows. My address and date of birth are known to the Inquiry.
2. I am divorced and I have four children and eight grandchildren. I sadly lost my mum five years ago this Christmas, I have a brother, Christopher Chilvers. I am making this statement on behalf of my Dad Herbert Jack Chilvers who received blood from a transfusion and subsequently contracted hepatitis C. He became ill and died on GRO-C 1980, I was aged 11.

Section 2. How Affected

3. My Dad was a caring Dad; he was hardworking and looked after the family. He took us on holiday to Butlins and taught me how to ride a bike. He was always there for us

4. I was about 6 years old when mum told me that my Dad had a knee op at Medway hospital and had a blood transfusion. This was in around 1975. As far as I am aware he was not given any information or advice about the risks of infection.
5. My Dad became progressively ill. I don't know what stage my Dad was diagnosed with hepatitis because my mum was trying to keep strong for the family. As far as I am aware my Dad was not diagnosed until quite late into the onset of his illness.
6. I do not know what information was provided to my Dad about the infection and who provided that information. My mum had to deal with everything because my brother and I were so little. I was so young, all I knew is that Dad was very ill.

Section 3. Other Infections

7. It is my understanding that my Dad was infected with hepatitis C. I do not know if he received any other infections. My mum told me that my Dad had hepatitis but I do not recall her telling me what type of hepatitis it was. She said "it's the one that kills you", that is what mum used to say

Section 4. Consent

8. I do not know whether my Dad was treated or tested without his knowledge, without his consent, without being given adequate or full information, or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

9. As my father's illness progressed he was unable to work. He lost his mobility and could not use the stairs. My mum was caring for Dad 24 hours per day, she would sometimes ask me to sit with him while she went to the shops on the High Street. I was 10 years old. I remember feeling scared having to look after my Dad as he was very ill and could not move. My Dad was physically incapacitated, I was too young to appreciate his mental state at the time.
10. My dad was hospitalised a couple of times. However as far as I am aware my Dad did not receive any treatment to try to clear his Hepatitis C.
11. I was leaving the house to go to school with my Dad lying downstairs on the sofa, unable to get up or walk, not eating and hardly drinking. His skin was yellow, that's what I remember about how he looked at that time. My schooling was suffering, it was a really unhappy time. I felt different from other children and my friends stopped coming over as mum was always looking after Dad
12. I remember going to Brownies, coming home, seeing an ambulance outside the house knowing it was for my Dad. This was when he was very ill and had to be admitted to Medway Hospital.
13. Eventually my Dad went to a convalescent home in Broadstairs. I thought he would get better but when my mum took us for a visit my Dad was sitting in a chair and could hardly talk. My mum was really upset to see him like that. Soon after he came home, he was rushed to hospital and was in intensive care for weeks. We had to go to stay with neighbours as my mum was at the hospital every night.

14. When Dad was in intensive care, mum said that she did not want us to see him like that. She asked us to make a tape to see if it would help to wake him as he was unconscious. I made a tape of me talking to my Dad telling him that I loved him and telling him to come home.
15. I remember getting up one morning and mum was downstairs crying. She told me that my Dad had died, I was 11. It was horrible. My Dad died on GRO-C GRO-C 1980 aged 56, my mum was only 48 years old and a widow.
16. The Coroner told my mum that we could all die from the same disease that Dad had. So for three months my mum used to check mine and my brother's eyes to see if we had signs of hepatitis. We were never sent for any tests, mum was just told to check our eyes for signs of jaundice. Mum burnt all of Dad's clothes, she did not keep any of his possessions because she was worried about the spread of the infection.
17. The Coroner wrote a report but I am not sure if there was an Inquest. Mum always said that when Dad's body was in the mortuary there was a Union Jack over the coffin because he had served in World War II.
18. My Dad had to be cremated because he had hepatitis. I remember sitting in the funeral car, everyone was in black but mum let me wear a flowery dress, I was 11 and she did not want me in black. I remember there were lots of people at the funeral, lots from my Dad's work as he used to work at the Chatham dock yard as a leading slinger. I think my brother was too upset to go to the funeral, he was 15 years old at the time. My Dad's death changed my whole family.

19. My mum's hair went white within weeks of my Dad dying. I did not want to go to school as mum was so sad. I remember mum just withdrew from life, she stopped eating and I could hear her crying at night. I remember making my mum some toast, I had never cooked before as our neighbours were cooking for me and my brother. My mum ate the two slices of toast that I had made her and broke down crying.
20. My aunty used to come down to do the washing and iron our school clothes. I read in the newspaper about a mum whose children were taken into care, I thought that this was going to happen to me and my brother as mum had given up on living and was still not eating.
21. I really started to worry and I used to cry at school, I was still at junior school. The children found out my Dad had died and one girl said "I am glad your Dad is dead" and beat me up in the playground, I was bruised but did not tell my mum as she had enough to worry about.
22. My brother Chris did not talk about Dad's death at the time, he did not attend the funeral and still does not talk about it today
23. I remember feeling self-conscious about Dad having Hepatitis; mum told me that she heard people talking about her. I still feel that there is a stigma attached to hepatitis. I worry about talking about it because I know people will think "how did he catch that?" I worry that people will think that I might have it.
24. My mum did not receive any help financially, all she got was a widows' pension. When my dad was off sick before he got sick pay but it was hardly anything. Mum was unable to maintain the house and it did deteriorate over time. We had to have second hand furniture, second hand carpets and

things like that. There were things that we could not have any more but mum always put me and my brother first.

25. Growing up without a Dad has been heart breaking. Mum had to go to work whilst grieving for my Dad; seeing her not eating, not sleeping and working hard to look after me and my brother has shown me how much I love my mum. And my mum always loved my Dad, she never stopped loving my Dad until she died aged 82.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

26. My mum did not ever receive any support. We felt ignored and neglected. As far as I am aware she was not offered any counselling.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

27. My mum did not ever receive any financial help. I am not aware of any financial schemes; we have never received any payments as a result of my Dad receiving contaminated blood.

Section 8. Other Issues

28. Mum always said that Dad had got the hepatitis from the blood transfusion in 1975, I think that Dad always knew that this is where he got it too. Mum had a friend who worked in the hospital at the time who said that the blood had not been screened properly. But at that time proving it was an issue. My mum was told that if she tried to take legal action she would lose her house, and me and my brother would lose our home as well as losing our Dad. I do not know who told her that. Last year my daughter sent me a link to an

article stating that the government had admitted what happened, Mum had been right all along.

29. I want people who allowed this to happen to be identified and to be held culpable for the effects they have had on all of the families concerned. I want recognition that those responsible were negligent, that this was an avoidable situation and should never have happened.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C _____

Dated 5th February 2019