

Witness Name: Simon Hamilton

Statement No: WITN2339012

Exhibits: WITN2339013-

WITN2339043

Dated: 25th August 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

EXHIBIT WITN2339038



Haemophilia NI
Supporting patients and families

Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health NI
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29 May 2020

Dear Minister

Firstly, may I thank you for your commitment and approach in facing the scourge of Covid-19. This has for you since taking up post, been a 'baptism of fire' handling the nurses pay issue and then addressing our needs as a community of victims from contaminated blood.

I have taken some time to respond to you in light of the circumstances and pressures you have been under, and upon reflection on your correspondence with our campaign colleagues Paul Kirkpatrick and **GRO-A** (dated 5 May).

I have some observations I feel warrant a response and respectfully ask that you will consider these.

I, like my colleagues, am strongly persuaded that you have adopted a different position from the one espoused during our last teleconference, where you repeatedly assured us that scheme payment parity would be addressed. You will understand that we rightly or wrongly accepted that payment scheme parity would be based on the 2018-2019 solution you reached earlier this year (uplifts being retrospective). We made that assumption based on your response to **GRO-A**, Nigel Hamilton and Paul Kirkpatrick who all sought the same clarification on scheme payments and uplift. We were left with the distinct impression that the uplift precedent you had set for 2018-2019 would be established until the end of the Public Inquiry, so you will understand that we have considerable dismay to learn that that is not the case.

1. I would like clarification on why a precedent which was set has not been established.

I do appreciate your position, or rather ambition, to ensure 'proper' parity with England and the other regions. However, this appears purely aspirational when you do not have the funds to meet that stated objective. We struggle to understand what benefit there is for the scheme recipients in aspiring to 'find parity' across the scheme when there is clearly insufficient money to achieve that.

2. I would like clarification on why the money from the Department of Finance (ringfenced to provide achievable parity is still being withheld).

Why can your officials not continue to strive with this ambition while the uplift is implemented in the meantime (as set out in your precedented solution)?

I have some concerns regarding the progress of this ambition. Your stated objective appears to be one based on a correspondence I had with your Permanent Secretary Mr Richard Pengelly, prior to the reconvening of the Assembly (we corresponded on 15 August and a copy is attached).

3. I would like to know what progress has been made on the establishment of parity outlined by Mr Pengelly in his August letter to me prior to you taking post.

You see Minister, there appears to be very little evidence of any progress while the Public Inquiry trundles on through the pandemic to its inevitable end. Yet, we continue to see prevarication and



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semantics obstructing actual progress. Where is the accountability in a process that seems to lack the finances to make it possible.

4. I would like to know whether you intend to withhold any parity uplift unless you can achieve a 'complete' parity arrangement. As you know this doesn't exist across any of the regions after two years of verbal 'wishing' and aspiration from Cabinet and devolved institutions.

Minister, I do appreciate all that you have done and perhaps the disappointment and frustration of the scheme recipients hinges on the confidence we have had since you took post. However, we are seasoned in facing disappointment and prevarication and consequently, I urge you to do what is currently achievable while still aspiring through your officials for something more.

I respectfully look forward to your response, when you have time to write.

Kind regards

GRO-C

Simon Hamilton

Chair Haemophilia NI