

Lost records deny chance of redress

Health

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Time is running out for British victims of bad blood products who wish to sue those manufacturers they blame for infecting them with HIV and hepatitis C.

Around the country, victims are finding that the medical notes they need to join a class action in the American courts have either gone missing, or have been destroyed.

Collette Winnle wants redress - and it's hardly surprising. Infected with a life-long, life-threatening disease - Hepatitis C - she wants the chance to sue those she blames for her infection.

But she may soon miss her day her court - just because she can't get hold of the medical records she needs to take legal action.

One of the hospitals which treated Collette - Glasgow Royal infirmary say they did manage to find her notes after they had been contacted by C4 News. But nearly two weeks later still haven't handed them over to her.

We've spoken to other patients still struggling to get hold of their records from this hospital. And this situation is being repeated up and down the country.

Patients are being told records have been lost or destroyed. If they do access notes, often crucial information is missing.

- In Yorkhill Hospital they say they've handed over all their records - but vital batch numbers are missing.

- In Pembury Hospital, they say - it "was not practice to write down batch numbers" when giving treatment.

- In Manchester Royal Infirmary they say they have no record of notes a patient claims are missing.

At Southampton General, two whole volumes of one patients "records have gone missing" - although they

say they're still looking.

Thousands of British haemophiliacs were infected with HIV and Hepatitis from contaminated blood products in the 1980s.

Those who are still alive now hope to sue the American manufacturers of the products think they can prove were responsible.

But to do so they need accurate records of exactly what products they were treated with and when - and if they don't get them over to the US soon they'll run out of time to join in the class action.

In Edinburgh **GRO-A** has spent months outside Scott Parliament campaigning for infected haemophiliacs.

He's had some government compensation for the HIV he contracted, but none for the Hep C he also suffers from.

His one hope for any kind of recompense is the US legal action - and he has been lucky enough to get hold of his notes - although not without a struggle and he thinks he knows why: they contained a nasty surprise.

He claims his doctors had known about his Hepatitis infection for years before they ever told him.

Haemophiliacs only received compensation for HIV if they did not make any other claims against the NHS. They didn't know many of them already had Hepatitis - but they complain many of their doctors already did.

Betrayal doesn't even begin to describe how Peter Longstaff feels about a health service which has given him HIV, HEP A B and C - and exposed him to vCJD.

For over ten-years he wasn't even told about the Hepatitis C - a condition that is at least as likely to kill him as the HIV.

Only when they got hold of Peter's treatment notes did he and his partner discover his Hep C infection had been kept secret for years.

They've complained to the General Medical Council about testing without consent - and are convinced this is why others struggle to access their records.

If vital information is not now released to patients in the next couple of weeks their best chance to seek any redress will pass.

And Peter's health is failing faster now - but he and Carole will not stop demanding answers about why he was infected, who knew about it and, crucially, when.