

Witness Name: LMM Ashcroft

Statement No: WITN1080001

Exhibits: WITN1080002-3

Dated: March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LINDA MARGARET MARY ASHCROFT

I, Linda Margaret Mary Ashcroft will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Linda Margaret Mary Ashcroft and I was born on GRO-C 1955. I live at GRO-C Wales, GRO-C
2. I make this statement as an affected widow in relation to my late husband, William John Dumbelton, who was born on GRO-C 1942 and passed away on 23rd October 1991, aged only 49, as a result of receiving contaminated blood products.
3. **This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my husband's medical records. I have been advised by the Trust that his medical records have been "lost".**

Section 2. How Affected

4. My husband had Severe Haemophilia A and was infected with Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV as a result of receiving contaminated blood products.

5. **Exhibit WITN1080002** is a letter dated 24th June 2011 from Samuel J Machin, Professor of Haematology to the Skipton Fund confirming that my husband received *"NHS blood products including fresh frozen plasma, cryoprecipitate and British Lister Factor VIII concentrate. Although the hospital Trust does not have a complete or indeed any documented evidence I remember as the consultant in charge of the haemostasis services from about 1985 onwards that he received a regular supply of other NHS and commercial concentrates. Unfortunately we only have NHS hospital records concerning Mr Dumbelton from 1958 to 1979. Surprisingly, the more recent notes are missing, mainly because of change in UCLH management (formerly UCH) after the merger with the Middlesex Medical School (where I used to work).*
6. The exhibit continues *"Looking back I remember Mr Dumbelton who was one of my patients and I remember that he was HIV positive, Hepatitis B positive, and had significant liver abnormalities, but died in 1991 before Hepatitis C testing was standardised. In my professional opinion, I believe it is highly likely-and If I were asked to give a percentage figure I would say greater than 95%-that he was Hepatitis C positive and that is what caused/contributed to his death".*
7. My husband was treated at the Haemophilia Centre at the University College of London (UCLH) between 1977 and 1986. **Exhibit WITN1080003** is a copy of a letter from Linda Wilkinson to Whom it may concern, dated 17th February 2012, which confirms that *"William was one of our most acute Haemophiliacs requiring constant prophylaxis to ensure a Factor VIII level commensurate with staying alive".* His consultant was Professor Samuel J Machin, Professor of Haematology.
8. My husband was not provided with any information regarding the risks of receiving blood products.
9. I am unsure as to who told my husband he had Hepatitis B because he was already Hepatitis B positive when I met him in 1977.

10. I recall that my husband had a number of HIV tests but that mysteriously the results went missing and it was in fact me who ended up telling him he was HIV positive. I refer to paragraph 24 of my statement in this regard.
11. During a later consultation at UCLH my husband was advised by one of the consultants that he should wear protection during sexual intercourse in order not to pass the virus on to me. However, this advice came at a much later stage and in the intervening period I had been put at risk of being infected with HIV via sexual intercourse.
12. I am of the view that my husband was not given sufficient information to allow me to manage or understand his HIV or Hepatitis B infections.
13. My husband was never told about his Non-A non-B (NANB) Hepatitis and he passed away on the cusp of when NANB Hepatitis became known as Hepatitis C. He was, however, told that he had cirrhosis of the liver.

Section 3. Other Infections

14. My husband was never told that he was at risk of vCJD or any other viruses.

Section 4. Consent

15. It is likely that my husband was tested for a number of viruses, to include NANB Hepatitis, HIV and Hepatitis B without his knowledge and therefore impliedly without his consent.
16. UCLH took my husband's bloods on an "*ad hoc*" basis. He always complied with whatever they wanted. Neither of us had any idea why the blood was being taken; no one ever asked his permission or told us for what purposes it was being taken for. I am convinced that UCLH stored his blood.
17. UCLH also wanted to take my blood but I didn't want to know. During this time, I just wanted to die with my beloved William.

Section 5. Impact

18. At around the time that William's HIV tests were going missing, he took to "*self-medicating*" on his nights off at British Telecom (BT). He was on a shift rota so had some nights on and some nights off. One particular night, after having a drink and becoming upset about whether or not he had HIV, unbeknown to me he had climbed over the fence into the neighbour's garden whilst I was asleep in bed, in the bedroom at the front of the house.
19. William had become increasingly upset that the neighbours' actions had caused our house to become infested with mice. Their rear garden was completely overgrown and they were not living in the property due to their marriage having broken down. We owned our home but our neighbour's property was owned by the council. William wanted to prove to the council that the property was empty.
20. Having climbed over the fence, William broke the windows of our neighbour's property because he had planned to ring the Council from inside their house and if someone was living there, they would want their windows replacing. William thought that this was good plan at the time. However, to do such a thing was completely out of character for my husband.
21. Whilst attempting to break the windows, William fell and broke his arm. I had woken up the next day and headed into work early, as I did every day, to open up the Pearl Switchboard. I always left William sleeping downstairs on his sofa bed because it was easier for him to be next to the bathroom, which was on the ground floor of our property. He was also unable to climb the stairs after bad bleeds.
22. Later on that morning, William telephoned me from the house to report his injury. He thought that he had broken his arm and so we planned to meet at UCLH, with William driving himself there and me going straight from work because my office was close to the hospital.

23. We arranged to meet at the Haematology Department; a department which we both knew well. I ended up arriving at the hospital first and I told them that he had been "*self-medicating*" because he was worried about whether or not he had HIV. I told them that it was killing him not knowing and like I said, climbing over a fence was so totally out of character for him. William used elbow crutches due to his hip operation not being a success and he had apparently used his crutches to smash the windows of our neighbour's property.
24. I am pretty sure that it was Linda Wilkinson who told me, at this point, that William was HIV positive. There may have been another person there as well, as she saw me in the corridor when she told me this news. She told me that they did not want to tell him that he was HIV positive as they loved him so much. There was always a group hug with Linda Wilkinson. So that is why I was the one to tell him. I did this when he arrived at the hospital with his broken arm. To this day I still have no idea how he drove to the hospital using his elbow crutches. I suppose he was so used to being in pain.
25. William changed overnight when he found out that he had HIV. His erratic behaviour became even worse and I felt so sorry for him. He tried to take his own life by injecting air into his veins and he also made desperate telephone calls to the Samaritans. He also changed his religion and became a Catholic.
26. UCLH did tell William that he had cirrhosis and that he should stop drinking. William took this advice on board and immediately stopped drinking any alcohol.
27. My husband was selected for a trial which was being run by Dr Craske. However, following his selection, his liver was too badly damaged for him to take part. The cirrhosis really took hold and my poor William suffered with a lot of physical pain as well as being constantly exhausted.
28. William also suffered from very high blood pressure due to his HIV infection.

29. One of the hardest things for William and I was the stigma attached to HIV. William did not want me to tell anyone about his HIV status so, in the main, only his close family knew. This also meant that I could not confide in anyone and had to deal with a lot of my feelings on my own. Sadly, **GRO-D**

GRO-D

30. William's fear of the stigma did make him paranoid. It was so unfair how people treated others with HIV.

31. However, William did become braver and he actually told his employer, who was BT at the time. He wished he had not taken this course of action because the disclosure resulted in him losing his job as a Telephonist Supervisor and Union Representative in the City of London. However, BT kept him on doing some night work in the City. Shortly after this, we relocated to **GRO-C** in Cambridgeshire because the company who employed me, Pearl Assurance in High Holborn, were relocating there. William tried to obtain a job at a **GRO-C** Telephone Exchange but BT blocked this move. This meant that William had to continue with his night work job in London and stay with his parents at their home in **GRO-C**. He came to visit me in **GRO-C** and this put more pressure on him in relation to making the relatively long car journeys. This continued until one day, quite unexpectedly, a BT personnel, offered William a "*golden hand shake*" to retire early. He must have been aged about 47 or 48 at this time and he gladly accepted their offer.

32. Following our move to **GRO-C** we joined an AIDS help line but no one ever telephoned us. William's life was flashing before him and he wanted to live forever. It was such a sad and difficult time.

33. William became poorly fairly quickly. He was admitted to Peterborough Hospital just before he passed away. I cannot fault the standard of care displayed by the medical professionals at this hospital. I advised the Accident

and Emergency Department, upon his admission, that he was HIV positive and they thanked me for this. They called the priest that evening and I was with William when he was read his last rites in intensive care. He had suffered a massive brain haemorrhage.

34. I was also allowed to stay in his room after his ventilator had been switched off. The student nurses were present and everyone was in floods of tears. I ended up comforting the student nurses and I actually saw William's brain haemorrhage as a relief for both of us. Some of the suffering ended that night and some of it continued to the present day.

35. My mother had a heart attack the night before William's funeral and only lived for another 2 months after this. Therefore, within a very short space of time I lost two loved ones who were very dear to me.

GRO-D

GRO-D

36. Following Williams' passing I had to work full time to pay our mortgage off because due to William's infections he was unable to take out any form of life insurance.

37. I have struggled mentally following the loss of William (and of course my mother). In fact one of the most difficult times was during the 19 months it took me to secure the Stages 1 and 2 Payments from the Skipton Fund between 2011 and 2013. I ended up very depressed and was given a course of course of counselling, funded by the Hepatitis C Trust. Following the Skipton saga I was put on antidepressants.

38. Currently I suffer from anxiety and I just hope that this Inquiry provides some long awaited answers to those who are suffering.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

39. William never received any treatment for his HIV or his cirrhosis.

40. At one stage, we did try and change his hospital from UCLH to Addenbrookes, Cambridgeshire, but they considered that William was too expensive to treat with Factor VIII and was therefore not an attractive proposition for another Trust to take on. Therefore, it was highly unlikely that the New Trust would fund any HIV treatment for him so we ended up staying put at UCLH. However, at no point did he have any HIV treatment at UCLH or any other hospital.

41. William was not offered any counselling or psychological support.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

42. William received a monthly payment from the Macfarlane Trust but I am unsure as to how much this was or when it commenced.

43. I never received a penny from the Macfarlane Trust in my own right.

44. I did however have some dealings with them in relation to William's financial support and I found the representatives of the Trust to be "icy cold". The name GRO-D springs to mind; she used to sip her drink whilst "talking down" to me on the telephone.

45. I had a particularly difficult time in relation to securing any financial payment from the Skipton Fund. It took me 19 months to receive the Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments on behalf of my husband. **Exhibit WITN1080002**, already referred to above, was written in support of my application to the Skipton Fund in respect of the Stage 1 payment.

46. I received the Stage 1 payment of £20,000 in or around September 2011.

47. In respect of the Stage 2 payment I had to deal with the appeal panel on a number of occasions. The appeal panel had amongst other "experts" Dr

Patricia Hewitt who was the Haematologist for the National Blood Bank. The panel dismissed **Exhibit WITN1080002**.

48. I then finally had a breakthrough. I found my husband's old Haematologist who was Linda Wilkinson and she wrote to Nick Fish at the Skipton Fund/appeal panel on 17th February 2012 and this letter has already been referred to above; **Exhibit WITN1080003**.

49. The appeal panel sat on this letter for a year. During this time, I was struggling and was offered and took up counselling funded by The Hepatitis Trust. Sitting at my sessions was truly awful. I was sounding like a complete nutter telling my counsellor that the Government were concealing facts about the contaminated blood issue. I even questioned myself at times and I felt completely let down and "*blocked*" by the Skipton Fund.

50. So after 19 months of "*hell*" I finally received the Stage 2 payment. I had carried out vast amounts of research, emailed numerous Liver Professors at various hospitals and poured my heart out only to be asked why I was asking so many questions. It is my belief that one of these Professors whom I had contacted (Professor Howard Thomas) later joined the Skipton Fund as a medical director and it was he who passed my Stage 2 application, not the appeal panel.

Section 8. Other Issues

51. I actually met Linda Wilkinson at a demonstration outside Westminster in relation to the contaminated blood issue a couple of years ago. She told me that she had had a **GRO-A** over what had happened during the contaminated blood scandal. She had left the NHS and she wrote a book on the memoirs of her life which actually mentioned my beloved husband. I attended her book signing in relation to this book in London. I always remember how much William admired and respected Linda Wilkinson and it was always a dull day at UCLH if she had a day off and when she left the place was never the same again.

52. I want the truth to come out and I want answers from this Inquiry.

Anonymity

53. I do not want to be anonymous and I do not wish to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed..

GRO-C

Dated...23-3-2019...