

Witness Name: Michael John Blake

Statement No: WITN1100001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 25th January 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MICHAEL JOHN BLAKE

I, Michael John Blake will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Michael John Blake. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1952 and I live at GRO-C with my wife, Diana.
2. This impact statement is made in relation to our son, Stuart Michael Blake (Stuart) who was born on the GRO-C 1978 and died on the 29th May 2006 at the age of 27. We also have a daughter, Laura, who was born on the GRO-C 1980 and two granddaughters, GRO-C (13) and GRO-C (11). I am a retired design engineer.

Section 2. How Infected

3. Stuart was diagnosed with severe haemophilia A in 1979 when he was GRO-C months old by the Great Ormond Street Hospital. Unfortunately as a result he was treated with infected blood products and developed hepatitis C and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

Section 3. Impact

4. Stuart was ill more or less throughout his life. The initial diagnosis of haemophilia was devastating but we felt that with the use of Factor VIII he would have a normal life but then Stuart was diagnosed with Hepatitis C (although we were not initially told what it was called) and (HIV), which was again devastating.
5. It was very difficult and traumatic for me on an emotional level to deal with Stuart's condition. I became more introverted and I suppressed my emotions. During difficult times such as this many people rely on the support mechanism of their friends and family; however, we could not do so. Stuart did not want anyone to know of his condition apart from our immediate family, and we had to respect that. I also did not want to project my worries to Diana, as I knew that she already had a lot to deal with and I did not want to add to that.
6. Losing Stuart was hard for a number of reasons. I feel that I have not only lost a son but also a best friend, we used to spend a lot of time together, playing golf and watching sport. The illness initially affected our relationship as the HIV affected his brain and his personality changed. Later the illness took him away from us altogether causing a massive void in my life.
7. I have dealt with a great amount of guilt throughout my life, because of Stuart's condition. The nature of my job as a project engineer and later as a manager meant that I was required to travel regularly and for long periods of time, so I was away from home for long periods of time. I enjoyed the travel aspect of my job, but it also proved to be the major source of guilt in relation to Stuart's illness. It is fair to say that the guilt affected my enjoyment of the job.
8. I felt guilty for a number of reasons, including the fact that I was away from my family, leaving Diana to care for Stuart. I also felt guilty because Diana did not have the opportunity to have her own career. She was devoted to Stuart, which

was physically and emotionally exhausting, whilst I was away often working abroad.

9. My boss was one of the first people to become aware of Stuart's condition as there were times when I had to drop everything at work and head home. Thankfully he was very supportive.
10. Stuart's condition also affected my career as I would often decline assignments when I was a Project Engineer so that I could be at home with Stuart and support Diana. Whilst my original role allowed flexibility, once I had achieved a senior role I was not in a position to refuse assignments.
11. Whilst I wanted to be at home to be with Stuart and support Diana, equally I had to work to support our family financially. We are a very close family and it has made Diana's and my relationship much stronger.
12. When Stuart had his second seizure in 2003, I was away working in Australia on a long term company assignment; as a result I finished my assignment early to return to the UK to be with my family a difficult time.
13. As stated above, we did not speak to people outside of our family about Stuart's illness and also as there was a lot of stigma attached to HIV in particular, I did not want Stuart to be labelled.
14. As a result there were frustrating situations that I have had to experience. People would say unreasonable and ignorant things about the HIV condition and I was unable to speak out as Stuart's condition was a secret.
15. I still find it very hard to see Stuart's friends with their fathers doing things together. It is truly heart-breaking, as I have been deprived of the chance to do the same.

Anonymity, Disclosure and Redaction

16. I confirm I do not wish to have anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the enquiry.

17. I wish to be called to give oral evidence if I can assist the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signed: GRO-C.....

Michael John Blake

Dated: **25** January 2019