

Witness Name: GEMMA LOUISE STEWART

Statement No: WITN2944001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: AUGUST 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GEMMA LOUISE STEWART

I, GEMMA LOUISE STEWART will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Gemma Louise Stewart. I was born on GRO-C 1988 and I live at GRO-C Hertfordshire GRO-C
2. My father, Angus Horatio Stewart (born on GRO-C 1965), was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) from contaminated blood products. He died from liver cancer on GRO-C 2013, aged 47.
3. My grandfather, Angus Stewart, was infected with HCV from contaminated blood products and died from liver cancer in 2002. My uncle, Mark Stewart, is also infected with HCV from contaminated blood products and is unwell.
4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my father's medical records.

Section 2. How Affected

5. My father had moderate Von Willebrand's disease. His father and brother (as referred to at paragraph 3) were also diagnosed with Von Willebrand's disease.
6. My father was treated at the Royal Free Hospital Haemophilia Centre under the care of Professor Christine Lee. My father was treated with Cryoprecipitate and then Factor VIII (FVIII) concentrate.
7. I was four years old when my parents split up. I saw my father on a regular basis up until I was 10 or 11 years old (when he remarried). I do not know when my father was told that he had HCV but I know (through my Uncle Mark) that there was a substantial gap between the hospital identifying the three of them as having HCV and actually being told of the diagnosis. There was evidence that the hospital knew my father had HCV from at least 1992. I was too young to be told anything about my father's HCV diagnosis but I know he was only told some long time after my parents had separated. My father confided to my uncle before his death that the HCV infection was instrumental in breaking up my parents' marriage. My father was very fond of my mother and, even after the marriage was over, he would spend as much time as he could with us.
8. My grandfather died in 2002 of liver cancer. I was 14 years old. I knew something was not as it should be because of snippets of conversation I overheard between my mother and grandmother about my grandfather's death. When I was 15 or 16 years old my grandmother told me that they had also found cancerous cells in my father's liver. I then learned more of the ins and outs of how my grandfather, my father and my uncle had all been infected by contaminated blood.
9. My uncle started looking into it in depth. My mother and grandmother said that my father was infected with FVIII concentrate brought from abroad. They said the FVIII concentrate was brought from prisoners.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. My father and my Uncle Mark received a letter notifying them that they were at risk of vCJD.

Section 4. Consent

11. I believe my father was tested without his knowledge and consent. My Uncle has my father's medical notes and records. They are incomplete with many missing but it is clear that my father tested HCV positive some time before being told. He did not know he had been tested. Neither did my uncle and grandfather.
12. My father and uncle were given FVIII from when they were young. They also took part in some sort of trial. They believed that they were used as guinea pigs.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

13. I did not see much of my father from when I was 10 or 11 years old up until I was 15 or 16 years old but my mother and I remained in contact with my father's side of the family. When my grandmother told us that my father had cancer, I started to see more of him again.
14. My father was a horologist making watches for Marks and Spencer in Baker Street. He then set up his own business, travelling to a lot of places like Switzerland and Mumbai. He was passionate about watches but really struggled to work after being diagnosed with cancer.
15. I remember that my father needed a liver transplant but was thought to have too many tumours on the liver for that to be possible.

16. I was 17 or 18 years old when my father became the recipient of a domino liver transplant. A Greek man received the good liver and my father received the liver belonging to the Greek man. The liver donated by the Greek man was not good because of the age of the donor. It bought my father more time and was a life line for him.
17. After my father had his liver transplant we then found out the cancer had spread to his joints. I remember him having radiotherapy on his shoulder to treat the cancer. My father developed multiple cancers secondary to liver cancer. He was ultimately told that he had just 6 months to one year left to live but he fought for 5 years. He was a fighter. He believed in mind over matter.
18. My uncle stayed with my father for a while. My father was relieved that the cancer had not spread to his brain. My father's HCV infection had an enormous impact on his life and on his psychological well being. My father was relatively young when I was born. He knew something was very wrong. He did not know that he had HCV and why he was feeling unwell. He did not feel right. He felt tired, emotional and felt like running away. He and my mother probably would have not split up had he knew he had HCV. He had no idea why he was struggling at that time.
19. My father remarried and I had no relationship with his wife growing up. I was then kept at arm's length by my stepmother when my father was dying. I was told that my father was OK and not to come over. She wanted to control the situation. I was seven months pregnant with my father's first grandchild. It was an anxious and stressful time for me and I am deeply affected by it still. I was told that I could visit my father at 5.00 pm the day before he died. My father was a big man, over six feet tall. He wore a large clothing size. When I saw him I was shocked. He did not look like himself. He was tiny in the bed. I can still picture how he looked to this day.

20. My father died at home. It was hard for me to allow myself to grieve. Being heavily pregnant I did not want my poor mental state to affect my unborn child. My father was robbed of a relationship with his first grandchild, a granddaughter [GRO-C] born the following [GRO-C] and then a grandson [GRO-C] born to me in [GRO-C] 2015. My grandmother was with my father at the very end. She helped nurse him as did she my grandfather. My grandmother is now a shell of the woman she was before. Her pain is not over now watching another son deteriorate.

21. My uncle is very unwell. He tries to shield us (me, my cousin and my grandmother) from the details about his health. He goes to his hospital appointments and does not tell us what is going on. He has already said that he will not be as strong and fight for as long as my father.

22. I suffer with bad social anxiety and depression. My fear of dying is off the scale. My GP was a trainee doctor at the Royal Free Hospital. I struggled to talk to her at first because she was quite defensive about the contaminated blood issue. I have told her that I don't care about her opinion just about feeling better and ensuring my children are unaffected. Three members of my family were directly affected by the contaminated blood scandal. I did not suffer with anxiety, depression or a fear of dying before this happened. I am on anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medication.

23. Before I had my children I was working in a special needs school in Wembley but I was signed off work for 12 months because of anxiety and depression. I currently work 16 hours a week as a Senior Manager and SENCO for a nursery. I work for my mother in law as my levels of anxiety can make it hard for me to reliably commit to work and she understands.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

24. I do not know whether my father was offered any HCV clearing treatment. My father was probably offered counselling when he was diagnosed with cancer as we were all offered it.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

25. With regard to financial assistance, I believe my father's wife either claimed the payments with him before he passed away or after he passed away. I got in touch with the Skipton Fund and they said the money had been claimed.

Section 8. Other Issues

26. Somebody needs to be held accountable for this as they are currently living their lives like nothing has happened. It is horrendous and I try to not think about it most days.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

27. I am not seeking anonymity and I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry. I do not want 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.....

10/9/19