

Witness Name: S Willis
Statement No: WITN1609001
Exhibits: 0
Dated: March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SARAH WILLIS

I, Sarah Willis, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sarah Willis of [GRO-C]. My date of birth is [GRO-C] and I have 5 children.
2. I prepare this statement as an affected daughter in relation to my late father Michael Willis (DOB: [GRO-C] 1950 and DOD: [GRO-C] 1991) who was infected with HIV, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B through receiving contaminated blood products.
3. **This statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late father's medical records.**

Section 2. How Affected

4. My father was born with severe Haemophilia A and received numerous treatments with blood products throughout his life. He was also on home

treatment and when my brother and I were very young we remember that the fridge was stocked with my father's treatments.

5. My father was treated at the Royal Victoria Infirmary Hospital (RVI) in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. I recall that one of his consultants was Dr Kate Talks.
6. My father contracted HIV, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B as a result of receiving contaminated blood products.
7. I am not aware of exactly when or how my father found out about his HIV infection. However, my grandfather told my brother that my father had been told about his HIV by the RVI. When my brother was aged only 17 my grandfather sat him down and told him that my father was HIV positive.
8. I do not know when or how my father found out about his Hepatitis C or Hepatitis B infections. The first time I found out that my father had been infected with Hepatitis C was in or around 2011 when my brother and I began the process of claiming financial assistance from the Skipton Fund.

Section 3. Other Infections

9. I do not know whether my father was exposed to the risk of vCJD.

Section 4. Consent

10. I am unsure as to whether my father was tested for various viruses without his knowledge and therefore without his consent. However, I strongly suspect that he was.
11. My whole memory of my father was that he was a severe haemophiliac who was always hooked up to some form of treatment at the RVI and therefore it is possible that he was used for the purposes of research without his knowledge or consent.

Section 5. Impact

12. I never expected what I saw at Newcastle train station in 1991. My grandfather met me at the train station and I could not wait to see my father but my grandfather warned me that he was in a bad way but I was not expecting the shock I got when I saw him. I just burst out crying; my father had turned into a walking skeleton, he was thin to the bone and struggling to walk on 2 crutches and he had lost most of his hearing.
13. September 1991 was the last time I ever saw my father alive. I was aged 15 and I stayed with him for 2 weeks.
14. Whilst I was staying with my father for these two weeks at his flat, he told me that once he was better he was going to take me on holiday and I could not wait. My father had a caravan up in Berwick and he really wanted to make my time with him special so my grandfather drove us up there but within a few hours my father was not feeling well so my grandfather came back and collected us.
15. I remember at night my father would listen to his radio in bed while I watched television in the living room but all I could hear was his radio; it was so loud yet he could barely hear it.
16. On the last few days of my visit he got worse so had to go into hospital but I visited him every day. He told me he wished I could stay with him and look after him but mother refused so at the end of the 2 weeks I cried my heart out leaving my father in hospital; that was the worst mistake of my life and I will never forgive myself for not staying.
17. That was the last time I saw him alive. He died on GRO-C 1991 and by the time my brother and I reached the hospital, he had died. We stayed with him for a while then I kissed his cheek, told him I loved him and then I never saw him again.

18. The funeral was just a blur; no one offered us his ashes or thought about putting a plaque up so we had a special place to visit; we therefore had nowhere special to go. All I know is that his ashes were spread at the local cemetery.
19. Once I was back home with my mother and her new husband, no one spoke about my father. My brother and I were expected to get on with everything, act normal and forget about my father. However, things were far from normal.
20. I felt so alone and I could not even tell my friends how he died because of the stigma of AIDS.
21. I used to go to bed really early and just lie awake dreaming of lots of different scenarios of how my father could come back to us. My exams were coming up and I had missed a lot of time off school and did not do very well when I sat these.
22. I not only lost my father, but I lost the whole of my father's family, too. My brother and I have missed out on so much. Our lives would be so different and so much happier had my father never contracted HIV as a result of his treatment with contaminated blood.
23. My father was robbed of his life, his family and his future just got taken away from him because of someone else's greed. I will never forgive the people who caused my father's death.
24. We have had to live with all of this pain and heartache. This should have never been able to happen.
25. My father had to spend the last few years of his life in so much pain and knowing that he had a death sentence inside him. He was just a young man; he should have been looking forward to spending time with his family, his friends and his kids, going on holidays, buying a new car and thinking of someday becoming a grandfather which were the normal things any other 30 year old man would be doing.

26. Unbeknown to him, my father did become a grandfather to 6 beautiful grandchildren; 5 of my own and 1 of brother's; yet he never got the chance to be a grandfather because his life was taken from him far too early.

27.

28. It would have been so nice to have had some support from my father and for him to see how amazing his grandchildren are

29. I just wish my father had had the opportunity to have had a healthy life; I wish he could have had the chance to grow old and to do all he wanted to in life, yet he spent his last few years confined to his home and in pain.

30. Whoever gave my father these awful illnesses took away his life choices, stole his future, stole my future, stole my brothers' future and our family's and his grandchildren's futures.

31. None of us will ever be truly happy because my lovely, funny, caring father is not in our lives.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

32. I am unaware as to whether my father was offered any counselling or psychological support.

33. I have never been offered counselling; I dealt with everything myself.

34. My father received substandard dental care and had false teeth as a result.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

35. I clearly remember my father telling my brother and me that he received £60,000 following the 1991 HIV litigation. My father called it "*hush-money*" and he had to sign a waiver to receive this. He left my brother and me £15,000 each which we received on our 21st birthdays. My father also gave me and my brother £2,000 on another occasion.

36. I am unsure as to whether my father received any support from either the Macfarlane Trust or the Skipton Fund.

37. In 2011 I applied to the Skipton Fund and was successful in receiving the Stage One Payment which was received in 2012 and was for £20,000.

38. Following receipt of this payment, my brother and I investigated the matter further and attempted to gain access to my father's medical records. We then applied for the Stage Two Payment but this was refused.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. I want the truth to come out from this Inquiry and I want those persons who are at fault to be held fully accountable for the decisions they made.

40. I want justice for my father.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

41. I do not wish to apply to retain my anonymity and if asked, I would be prepared to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

15 - 4 - 2019