Witness Name: Bryan Darragh
Statement No.: WITN2630001
Exhibits: 0
Dated: 18 December 2018

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BRYAN DARRAGH

Section 1. Introduction

I, Bryan Darragh, will say as follows:-

1. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry.

2. I am married and live with my wife in a retirement complex. We have one child who is currently living with us temporarily.

3. I am now retired.

Section 2. How Infected

4. In 1976 I was living in Leeds. I recall walking past Leeds Royal Infirmary one day. Sometime later I woke up in Chapel Allerton Hospital having suffered a perforated duodenal ulcer and also a gastric ulcer. I had been operated on as an emergency and, when I awoke, I had tubes coming out of my body. I was very lucky to have been near a hospital when it happened.

5. When the doctors spoke to me following the operation I was told that I had had a blood transfusion. They explained to me what had happened. I don't know how many transfusions I had.

6. I made a good recovery and was left with a scar from my breastbone to my navel. I had no complaints about the operation at the time. It saved my life.

7. I do not remember anything until I came round after the operation. As a result, I do not know whether any information or advice was given to me before the operation about the risk of being exposed to infection. A nurse brought me round. I presume I was told about what had happened afterwards due to the urgency of the situation, rather than before, but I cannot recall.

8. As a result of being given the infected blood I was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV).

9. It was 1989 before I found out that I had been infected with HCV. The National Blood Transfusion Service was asking for donations because they were extremely short. I went down to give blood and received a phone call either that night or the next morning asking me to go straight in, which I did. They told me that I had HCV.

10. A letter in my GP records from the National Blood Transfusion Service dated 5 January 1990 notes,

> *'As you probably know, a test has recently become available for the Hepatitis C virus (which used to be called Non-A, Non-B). Although we are not routinely screening blood donor samples for evidence of this virus, as yet, we are currently engaged in a limited trial in order to obtain estimates of prevalence and probable indirect costs. This long-standing donor's recent blood donation has proved to be repeatedly positive for anti-HCV. Unfortunately, these are no confirmatory tests available which will not only exclude a false positive reaction, but which will establish the precise significance of a positive test.*

Nevertheless, I have no choice but to exclude Mr Darragh's donation now and to remove his name from our panel of regular donors.

I have arranged for an ALT and a Hepatitis core antibody test to be carried out on his serum. Perhaps you would be so kind as to have liver function tests carried out locally. These results, in aggregate, should establish whether Mr Darragh is suffering from a sub-clinical chronic active or persistent hepatitis which might, in the future, lead to serious chronic liver disease. Depending on the results, it might also be wise to refer him to a Consultant specialising in liver disease, such as Mr Elias at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.'

(Page 63, GP records, letter available on request).

This letter followed the screening of my blood for HCV and I was excluded from donating as a result.

11. In terms of whether I was given adequate information to help me understand and manage the infection, I was given enough information at the time, bearing in mind that it was still fairly new and they did not understand it properly. I had no problem with what they told me. The consultant at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham specifically said it would have been as a result of a blood transfusion. They were aware I had suffered with drug addiction in the 1960s but they said the infection was caused by a transfusion. Chapel Allerton Hospital said I contracted Hepatitis B in the 1960s, but Hepatitis B cannot mutate into Hepatitis C, so that was discounted.

12. I do think information should have been provided to me earlier about the HCV infection. I think that Chapel Allerton Hospital were aware of what had happened, if not at the time of my operation then some years later. I should have been informed as soon as they knew that there was a risk of blood being contaminated.

13. The National Blood Service were pretty good in how they dealt with me when they knew I was infected with HCV. They told me about the infection and they made the appointment the next morning for me to see the consultant at the QE Hospital.

14. I was not given any information at all about the risks of others being infected as a result of the infection. It wasn't until I started a relationship with my present wife in 1992 that we went up to the hospital together to find out if there was a chance of infection. They said there was no chance at all, it was through blood.

Section 3. Other Infections

15. I do not believe I have received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

16. I do not believe I have been treated or tested without my consent, nor without being given adequate or full information. However, I don't know if I have been treated or tested without my knowledge as I don't know what they did at Chapel Allerton Hospital.

17. I have been treated and tested for the purposes of research. However, this was at the time that I was being treated for HCV and was with my consent as the consultant said my results would be used for research.

Section 5. Impact

18. Mentally, it has been distressing knowing that I have been infected with HCV. I was shocked and a bit scared because at the time I had been reading about HCV somewhere and it had recently been recognised as a specific disease as

opposed to non-Hepatitis B. I read it could cause cancer. I dismissed it. But when I was told I had it I was distressed.

19. Physically, I got tired a lot. All the time in fact. But I never put it down to being infected. I did not suffer with any further complication or conditions that I know of as a result of the infection. I did suffer from the side effects of treatment and I have set this out below.

20. They said that HCV was serious and that I would have to undergo a series of tests, etc, which confirmed it was HCV, and all the hospital appointments then started. I had liver biopsies every few months for the first six months. The cure at that time was the injection of a drug called Interferon B, which I had to inject twice a day for six months or a year. This was 14 years after the operation. I suffered severe side effects which I have described below.

21. I did not face any difficulties or obstacles in accessing treatment and there were no treatments which I consider ought to have been made available to me which were not.

22. When I began treatment I suffered with side effects. Whilst on Interferon B I became extremely depressed and suffered with suicidal thoughts. Normally I am a pretty gregarious sort of chap, but I went through a period of real depression. It lasted just longer than the length of the treatment, for about two years or so. Physically, I suffered with psoriasis, which I found very embarrassing because it is on parts of my body that are visible, such as my head and hands.

23. The treatment was successful and I was told the virus was in remission. I have had blood tests for other things since and have remained clear. It has been in remission for ten years.

24. I have not been told about any further risks. I have not had a liver biopsy for ten years. I have had a few cancer scares but have not been told that was anything to do with the HCV. The worst part of it all for me has been the depression. I do still suffer with depression now and again, but nothing I cannot handle. I wonder if it is a hangover from the depression during the treatment.

25. My infected status has never impacted upon my medical care or treatment for other conditions. I have always informed people I have had HCV. I was told to say that to nurses when they were treating me.

26. In terms of the impact of being infected with HCV on my private, family and social life, there was confusion for many years as not much was known about HCV. But I was always upfront with my friends. It was not difficult because I knew it was non-infectious.

27. When I met my wife again I was upfront about my infection. I suffered the embarrassment of having to take her down to the hospital to find out what the risks to her were. There was a stigma with that.

28. As for the stigma associated with the diagnosis, the main difficulty for me has been the psoriasis which started when I began treatment. That is still visible now. Otherwise, I do not feel any stigma.

29. During treatment I was not working, but it stopped me looking for work as there was no way I could have done it. The infection has therefore affected my work and had financial implications on my life.

30. As for the impact of my infection on those close to me, it has caused worry for my wife.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

31. I have not faced difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment, care and support as a result of being infected with HCV.

32. I was offered some psychological support when I was diagnosed with HCV, but I felt it was too late for me by then.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

33. I have not received any financial assistance from any of the Trusts or Funds set up to distribute payments. I have heard of the various funds and I did register my interest in the Skipton Fund after hearing financial assistance was available on the local news, but heard nothing further.

34. In terms of the difficulties faced when applying for financial assistance, they made you jump through hoops and the onus is on you, not on the fund. And with my records 'destroyed' there was no way I could prove it.

Section 8. Other Issues

35. I feel it was a different time then, there wasn't such a forensic approach to certain types of medicine that there is now. It was not as advanced as now. The government was in denial. They knew what had happened in the 1970s but they refused to admit it and did their utmost to hide it.

Additional questions for witnesses

36. I hope the Inquiry achieves an acknowledgement of guilt and an apology from the government. Just to admit that they were wrong and they knew it.

37. When I became aware of the Inquiry starting I phoned Chapel Allerton Hospital where I had had the operation and they told me quite bluntly that all the records were destroyed and that they could not comment. Despite saying that all my records were destroyed, they quoted records about me having Hepatitis B in the 1960s. They couldn't quote any records from the 1970s or the operation in 1976. How would they keep earlier records and not later records? I was pushed around about three departments. They knew I suffered with drug addiction in the 1960s. How would they have known that unless they had my records?

38. In terms of how I was treated as a person who had contracted a virus from contaminated blood by various medical professionals and government workers I have no complaints. When it was brought to light that I had Hepatitis C in 1990 the staff were brilliant. I was offered psychological help if I needed it, but it was too late for me then.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed ... GRO-C

Dated 4/6/19