

Witness Name: Mary Yvonne O'Driscoll
Statement No: WITN2383001
Dated: 4th April 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARY YVONNE O'DRISCOLL

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry rules 2006 dated 12th December 2018. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I, Mary Yvonne O'Driscoll, will say as follows:-

1. Introduction

1. My name is Mary Yvonne O'Driscoll. My date of birth is GRO-C 1956 and address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I am the wife of Michael O'Driscoll and we have one child, Jessica Mary O'Driscoll. Michael was diagnosed with severe Haemophilia A as a child.
3. He was infected with HIV and Hepatitis C through treatment with contaminated blood products.

2. How Infected

1. My husband was infected with HIV and Hepatitis C whilst under the care of the Royal Free Haemophilia Centre, Hampstead, London.
2. He was informed of being HIV+ at a routine appointment in 1985. He was not told that he had been infected with Hepatitis C until 1993.

3. Other infections

1. As far as we are aware, the only infections that he had contracted around this time were HIV and Hepatitis C. Although he has been told that he is deemed to be at a high risk of suffering variant CJD, and has also been exposed to Hepatitis B.

4. Consent

1. Michael does not recall any discussion at all about any risks that may be involved in the use of Factor VIII, so he did not provide informed consent. He does not recall consenting to the tests for HIV or Hepatitis C.

5. Impact

1. I met Michael in 1981. We met in a pub in London. At that time I was working as an accountant for Deloitte's. It was something of a whirlwind romance. We moved in together within three months in a house along with my brother and some other friends.
2. Michael did not initially tell me about his haemophilia. One day I came home from work and I opened the fridge and it contained his Factor VIII. It was then that he said he had something to tell me and he told me that he was a haemophiliac. I was not concerned as I was fairly familiar with the

term and what it meant as I had studied an A Level in biology and genetics.

3. We got married in August 1982. At the end of 1984 we decided to try for a family and I fell pregnant in February 1985.
4. I remember one day in June/July 1985 Michael went for a regular check for his haemophilia. He came home but he did not say anything, and I thought that there may be a problem. When we went to bed that night he said "there is something I need to tell you". He then told me that at his routine appointment in hospital he had been told that he was HIV positive and that he only had two years to live.
5. I did not know what to think it was a total shock to us both. We had both been doing so well in London and were expecting our first child. We are both very optimistic people and we tried to stay as positive as possible. However, in his darker moments, Michael began to say that he would never see her grow up or see her get married. I also began to think about the fact that I would be widowed as a single mother bringing up a child. There was also the very real possibility that I have been infected with HIV through Michael.
6. There was a terrible stigma around HIV at that time. People thought that those with HIV were part of the gay community or drug users. We had not even told friends that Michael was a haemophiliac. So we decided to tell no one that Michael had HIV apart from close family.
7. We went to see a doctor who advised that I should have an abortion due to the risks to our unborn baby. She also advise that we should never have unprotected sex. I was tested for HIV and the tests came back negative. We therefore decided to go ahead and have the baby.

8. When our daughter Jessica was born in GRO-C 1985, we were both delighted. However there was always a tinge of sadness, due to Michael's terminal prognosis. I took maternity leave and Michael carried on working in his role as a branch manager at a recruitment consultancy.
9. However, in April/May 1986 Michael suffered flu like symptoms and was unwell and off work. He started to struggle psychologically with his terminal diagnosis and the thought that he would not see Jessica grow up. He was in real mess and our relationship was suffering as he seemed to be taking his anger for what had happened to him out on me. It got so bad that we had a one week separation. Then we had marriage guidance counselling. In fact this was the first counselling Michael had received at all since being diagnosed with HIV. It ended up being counselling for Michael, rather than marriage guidance counselling, however it was what he needed and it worked,
10. At the end of my maternity he quit his job and stayed at home to look after Jessica. I don't think he wanted to miss a second of her growing up in the short time that he had been told he had.
11. It was very difficult for me then. I was missing out on the traditional family set up of the mother staying at home. I had to be the breadwinner for us to afford to live in London on one income, I had to leave Jessica and commute to a full time job as an accountant at a merchant bank. Apart from weekends, I only got to see her in the evenings to put her to bed. I also had the constant worry of losing my husband and bringing up our daughter alone. It was very tough and very upsetting and of course we told no one about Michael's health and so no one in work knew what I was going through.
12. In June 1987 we moved back to Wales. GRO-C in GRO-C as we had a lot more support and we felt it would be better for Michael and Jessica. I initially took a job working as an in-house accountant in a packaging

company. However I did not enjoy it and moved to Deloitte in Swansea which was better.

13. One of the biggest impacts on us a family was not being able to have more children. I will now deal with our efforts we made to have another child.

14. It had always been our plan to have three children. Michael is one of nine and I am one of four so we both came from large families. So in 1987 we talked about having another child. This meant having unprotected sex against the advice of the consultants. However, although I was initially against it due to the risk, I was finally persuaded as we were so desperate for another child. So we agreed to have unprotected sex on planned occasions to tie in with my ovarian cycle, to give us the best chance of conceiving.

15. When we had unprotected sex, I remember being incredibly tense and frightened. I remember driving into work the morning afterwards in a complete mess. I was thinking "what have I done?" I had put my health at risk for another child, when I should have been concentrating on being able to look after Jessica. It was such a worrying time as I was not only tested for pregnancy, but also for HIV. Sadly I did not fall pregnant. When I had the HIV test, they said it was negative but I would have to wait for 6 months to be sure. So I had another nervous wait. After that we decided not to try this any further due to the risks.

16. In 1988, we decided to try artificial insemination. This was done using live sperm at a private clinic in Swansea. This was initially successful and I became pregnant, but I miscarried after nine weeks. We were both really devastated. I carried on with this unsuccessfully for a further 9 months then stopped when the live sperm technique was banned. After a gap I then went to a clinic in London which offered frozen sperm pre tested for infectious disease. I kept trying for almost 2 years regularly taking pregnancy tests and being disappointed each time. I also had friends calling me to tell me that they were pregnant, although I always

congratulated them enthusiastically, I could not help but feel jealous on the inside. I found it very upsetting. By the time sperm washing was available it was too late for us, as I was a 40 and we decided not to keep on trying.

17. We then looked into adoption. We had numerous interviews which we seemed to pass. However, once Michael told them that he had HIV and it was a life limiting, we were told that we could not adopt. This was another crushing blow to our hopes of having a child.

18. A friend of ours then suggested that we should consider long term fostering instead. We always ensured that we fostered children of a much younger age than Jess so there would be no negative impact upon her. We then fostered children from 2000 onwards. Initially we fostered a boy of seven for two years until that fell apart due to his behaviour. We then fostered a girl for three months aged 10. She had HIV and was very disabled. We also were provided respite care for parents on weekends. In 2003 we fostered two sisters; one did not stay long with us. However the other one we fostered from the age of four until she was 15. When she was 15 she left to go back to her birth mother. That was very traumatic and upsetting. However, I am pleased to say that she is now back in the area and is back in touch with us. However, despite all of our efforts nothing was able to fill the void we felt about not being to have a larger family.

19. One of our greatest concerns was the impact it may have on Jessica. We have always tried to shield her from it. When Jessica was nine Michael had been away on a Birchgrove Wales event and he came back wanting to tell Jessica about his infection. I was dead against it as I felt she was too young and it may ruin her innocence. However, Michael persuaded me that we should tell her. He then told her explaining that he was not dying but he had HIV and there were complications. He told her that it was a family secret and she must not tell anyone. I then saw her and invited her to ask me any questions. Jessica was always a very sensible child. I believed that she felt trusted by being told our secret and I said that she

should not worry and should enjoy her life knowing that her father is not dying, but if and when the time comes we would let her know.

20. We were always concerned that if other people found out our family secret, they would judge us and treat us, in particular Jessica, differently through ignorance. We worried that the parents of the other children may not want her to play with their children and that she would be ostracised and have her life ruined.

21. Another major impact has been financial. At the time that I was pregnant with Jess in London just before Michael's diagnosis, I was working as an accountant in a global firm in London and Michael was the branch manager of a successful recruitment company specialising in construction. We both had excellent careers ahead of us. All this all changed following Michael's diagnosis. Michael lost his job and I became the only breadwinner. I tried doing as much as I could, working for merchant bank and then when we moved to GRO-C, working again for a global accountancy firm. However I could not go on not seeing Jessica, and I retrained and studied and passed the PGCE in 1998 and became a teacher. Michael tried to return to work, he set up a retail video shop with some of the grant money. However he could not cope physically or mentally with the financial pressures as a result of his condition and so we had to use an ex gratia payment we had received from the Government to pay off an outstanding loan on the store and we had to remortgage our house to pay a business overdraft. Michael also passed his PGCE in 2005/6, and was teaching when he was able to with his condition. However we are now at the point where Michael has no pension and I only have the small teacher's pension that I accrued.

22. We have also had to be very careful around the house to ensure that there was no risk of infection. Michael always did the cooking, and he is very careful to avoid cutting himself and, if he does, to deal with it hygienically to avoid any cross infection. It has become second nature to

take sensible practical approach such as always ensuring that needles are disposed of safely and keeping Michael's toothbrush separate.

23. Michael's condition has placed huge strain on our relationship. It has been awful for Michael, but he has been so incredibly stoical throughout his treatment. For example I recall on one occasion, after another bout of ill-health, he was an in-patient in hospital he was so ill that we all expected him to die until it was discovered that he was allergic to one of the medications. Also for almost two years he had a facial rash that left his face red and flaky but he still soldiered on with great fortitude. However, at times because of the side affects of his treatment he has been almost unbearable to live with. In 1994 he started six months of treatment for his hepatitis C using Interferon. This caused him terrible side-effects of deep depression, mood swings and anger mostly directed at me. He was like a different person. There was no way that I could continue being with him like this. It got so bad that we split up for five months. Michael went to live in a flat. We told Jessica that he was looking after the flat for a friend. I honestly did not think that we would get back together. I felt so guilty that I would be leaving Michael when he was so ill and that I would be breaking up Jessica's home life. However with the benefit of counselling, we were able to resolve our differences. When he had his second and third treatments with Interferon it was tough, but we were more able to cope as we knew what to expect and they were providing counselling and antidepressants. I recall a particularly low point on my 36th birthday. Michael was in hospital and I celebrated by having a pizza with Jessica after work. That day I had got up and walked the dog at 6 am, taken Jessica to school, worked all day and then gone to hospital. It was a very tough existence and every day felt like a repeat of the day before.

24. Our daughter Jessica now has three children of her own and we are very much enjoying being grandparents and this has helped to fill the void that we felt by not being able to have more children of our own. I finished work

to help to look after them in their early years as I was determined that I would not miss out again as I feel I did with Jessica.

6. Treatment/Care Support

1. I believe that both Michael and I should have been offered counselling and support when he was first told that he was HIV + by the Royal Free Hospital in London. I am also still very angry over the doctor who told me that I should terminate my pregnancy.
2. I know that Michael was in general much happier with his treatment in the Swansea Haemophilia Centre and we were greatly helped by the Social workers attached to the Cardiff Haemophilia Centre.
3. However, we have found the most support and strength through our own endeavours by being actively involved with Birchgrove Wales, which helped haemophiliacs with HIV and/or Hepatitis C and their families and SWISH, the Swansea Group.
4. I also feel that when Mike was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I was completely forgotten about. I was not tested or even spoken to. It was some time later that I came to understand that I could have contracted Hepatitis C as Mike was already Hepatitis C positive before we had begun using safe sex practices. I asked for the test and remember the doctors being surprised at my asking. Fortunately the result was negative when they tested me.

7. Financial Assistance

1. We have received-gratia payment from the Skipton trust. Michael has received regular payments through the MacFarlane Trust, MFET and now

WIBSS. He has also applied for specific grants and financial support for education and training and for IVF, but has been very frustrated at their attitude of turning down applications if they did not fit their narrow remit.

2. Whilst we have received some financial assistance it as no way compensated us for what we have lost even just in financial terms due to the impact of Michael being infected by contaminated blood.

8. Other Issues

1. I have no other issues to raise, other than to emphasise the devastating affect that the infected blood scandal has had on our family, and I am sure scores of other families across the country.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.

GRO-C

Dated... 4-4-19