

Witness Name: Jessica O'Driscoll

Statement No: WITN2385001

Dated: 24th April 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JESSICA MARY 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, Jessica Mary O'Driscoll, will say as follows:-

1. Introduction

1. My name is Jessica Mary O'Driscoll. My date of birth is GRO-C 1985 and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I am the only child of Michael O'Driscoll and Mary Yvonne O'Driscoll. My father 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 father 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 positive at a routine appointment in 1985, whilst my mother was pregnant expecting me. 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. My father does not recall any discussion at all about any risks that may be involved in the use of Factor VIII so did not provide informed consent. Nor does he recall consenting to the tests for HIV or hepatitis C.

5. Impact

1. When I was 9 years old my father sat me down and told me that he was HIV positive and its implications. He told me that he was well and had no intention of dying but he may become ill. He told me that it was a secret and that I must not tell anyone. My mother also spoke to me and reassured me that he was not dying and said that I could ask any questions I wanted, but that I should not worry, but if, or when, the time comes they would tell me.

2. I remember going to my gymnastics class afterwards. I was very close to my gym coach and I recall crying to her about it. Other than that moment, I have never told anyone about it whilst I was growing up. I did not even tell people that my father was a haemophiliac in case they put two and two together and worked out that he had HIV.
3. Although looking back I think I lost some of my childhood innocence when I was told what became our family secret about my father's health at the age of nine. There was such a stigma associated with HIV at that time. People thought it only affected the gay community or drug users and there was a lot of misinformation about how it could be spread. My parents tried to shield me from it to ensure that I had as normal a childhood as possible. I think my parents were really worried that, if people found out, it may ruin my childhood, by me being ostracised and other parents not wanting their children to play or associate with me. They did not want people to find out and wrongly judge us.
4. My father and I have always had a close bond. My father has always been very stoical about his condition and its effects, and my mother has always been very supportive of him. For a couple of years he had to contend with having a really bad facial rash that left his face very red and dry. I also remember that some of his treatments caused him to be very moody and short tempered. My mother had to bear the brunt of this and it put a significant strain on their relationship. They did all that they could to shield me from this.
5. My parents were involved in a haemophilia group, Birchgrove Wales, which helped haemophiliacs with HIV and/or hepatitis C and their families. I met other children who were a similar age to me and in the same circumstances. I found that this was helpful, but it also brought home to us that people in same position as my father were dying from the condition.

6. I remember as a child my father being very ill in hospital at one stage and me being very frightened that something may happen to him.
7. Growing up we had to be very careful around the house to prevent any cross infection. My father does most of the cooking but if he cuts himself, he would always be very careful to ensure that there is no cross contamination with the food. He also always disposed carefully of the needle that he uses. The only time that I can remember there being an issue was when I decided one day, as a teenager, that I would shave my legs before I went out. I did not tell my parents, and used one of my father's used razors. I remember that when my parents found out they were furious and they went mad with me, because I had been so careless and had put myself at risk by using his razor.
8. I think the main impact for me and my parents has been the fact the fact that they could not have any more children. As an only child, carrying the burden of having to keep my father's condition secret, I had no sibling to share it with. I now see that with my own children, aged five, four and two, what a close relationship they have. This is something that I never had.
9. I know that this had a great impact on my parents as they had always wanted to have more children. When their efforts to have children through Artificial Insemination and any other means failed, they tried to adopt. They were told that due to my father's condition they could not adopt but hey were so determined that they became long term foster carers. They were always careful to foster children much younger than me so that I would not be affected. However, fostering often involves very challenging children and had varying results, causing my parents a great deal of upset and heartache. To go through this as well as dealing with my father's condition at the same time shows how desperate they were to have more children. I hope that they now draw comfort from seeing and caring for my children. .

6. Treatment/Care Support

1. I find it incredible that my father was never been offered any counselling or support when he first told that he was HIV positive by the Royal Free Hospital in London. I know that my father has in general been much happier with his treatment in the Swansea Haemophilia Centre and were greatly helped by the Social workers attached to the Cardiff Haemophilia Centre. However, I think my parents have found the most support and strength through their own endeavours in being actively involved with Birchgrove Wales and SWISH, the Swansea Group.

7. Financial Assistance

1. I am aware that my parents received financial support and grants. However, the time of my father's diagnosis he and my mother were very successfully working in London with excellent career prospects ahead of them. My mother was developing her career as an accountant in one of the biggest firms in the UK and my father was an executive in a successful recruitment business. However, as a result of my father being infected with contaminated blood products, their whole working lives changed, so that they have had to make many compromises and sacrifices that have meant that at their current time of life my father has no pension and my mother only has a small pension from her job as a teacher.

8. Other Issues

1. I have no other issues to raise but I would emphasise that the effect of the infected blood scandal runs incredibly deep. I am deeply saddened that so many other families will have had similar experiences to my own family. They will also have had to face carrying a secret from the

outside world, due to the stigma associated with the conditions to which they exposed through infected blood, without warning or any adequate support. .

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 24/4/19