Witness Name: Gary Dwyer
Statement No.: WITN1868001
Exhibits: 0
Dated: 23 November 2018

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GARY DWYER

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

Introduction

1. I, Gary Dwyer, will say as follows: -

2. My name is Gary Dwyer. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry.

How Infected

3. In 1972, at the age of 14, I developed Lederer's haemolytic anaemia. Due to this condition I was admitted to Warrington General Hospital, Lovely Lane, Warrington WA5 1QG under the care of Consultant Physician Denis H. Freeman. (A copy of letters dated 14.04.1972 and 05.05.1972 are available to support this information). I was given a transfusion of whole blood at that time to treat the acute anaemia.

4. Neither myself, nor my parents, were given any advice regarding my condition other than to take a course of iron tablets to be prescribed by my GP, Dr. R. G. Forrest.

5. It would be many years until I became aware that the blood used for my transfusion was contaminated with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

6. Between the age of 14 years and my late teens, I was always more lethargic than my friends, often needing to take long naps. I developed skin problems e.g. psoriasis and often felt generally unwell, sometimes with flu like symptoms. Although I visited my GP to discuss these problems it was never suggested that I had further blood tests to check on my condition, I was only treated for the skin problems and prescribed more iron tablets.

7. In 1978 I met my wife Pamela Dwyer. We married on 14.06.1980. Gradually my health problems worsened which meant I had to take more sick leave than the average person. In the 1980s many companies became bankrupt or had to reduce staffing levels significantly. Due to my poor attendance records I was often made redundant and found it difficult to obtain another job. This was very stressful and worsened my condition further. In 1988 my wife became pregnant with our son. He was born prematurely on GRO-C.1988 at Whiston Hospital. My wife was questioned many times about her lifestyle, especially smoking and alcohol consumption, because our son was not only born early, he was regarded as underweight for his gestational weeks. My wife has never smoked and did not drink any alcohol during her pregnancy but to my knowledge no tests were carried out to investigate this issue further even though my wife's placenta had failed. The average placenta weighs 4lbs, my wife's placenta weighed 12ozs.

8. To help finance my wife's maternity leave I volunteered for overtime and changed to night shift. My wife was only due 90% of her salary for 6 weeks so I wanted very much to enable her to take as much maternity leave as she was entitled to take. Unfortunately, the longer hours and night shift made my health deteriorate even further and she had to return to work much sooner than she wished.

9. Over the next 18 months (late 1988 through 1989) I visited my GP several times hoping for help with my condition. I had started to have stomach pain, nausea and bouts of diarrhoea. It was only when my wife noticed that I looked jaundiced one day that I again visited my GP. My wife insisted, on this occasion, that I did not come home without the paperwork to go for blood tests as she believed I had an underlying problem that had never been diagnosed.

10. Finally, my GP, Dr.J. M. Hanrahan, had my blood tested. The results showed I had an abnormal liver function so he referred me to Consultant Physician/Gastroenterologist Mr. Faizallah at Whiston Hospital, Prescot, Merseyside L36 5DR, in February of 1990. Dr. Faizallah eventually diagnosed me with Hepatitis C (a copy of a letter dated 22.02.1990 is available to support this information). I initially had an ultrasound to check for liver damage and later I had a liver biopsy at Whiston Hospital.

11. No information was provided to me about the infection. I was not given adequate information to help me understand and manage the infection. My GP should have given me detailed information about my condition and how best to manage it, immediately he was informed I had Hepatitis C. He did not give me any information that I can recall.

12. The results of my tests were not discussed with me in any detail. I wasn't given information about the infection. The only advice I have ever been given was by Mr. Faizallah in 1990. He strongly suggested that I gave up alcohol completely for the foreseeable future. For special occasions I could have a pint of Guiness. If I did not limit my alcohol consumption I would very likely develop liver cancer and die a premature death. As it was almost impossible to socialise in the North of England in the 1990s without consuming some alcohol. As a result, my wife and I did very little socialising for many years.

13. I was given no information about infecting others.

Other Infections

14. I believe I have only contracted HCV by being given infected blood. I have been tested for HIV (the result was negative). I do not know if I have been tested for HBV or any other infection or infections.

Consent

15. I do not know whether I have been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent. I do not know whether I have been treated or tested and not been given enough information. I do not know whether I have been treated or tested for the purposes of research.

Impact

16. Since I was 14 years old I have suffered from fatigue, aching joints, skin problems and generally feeling unwell most of the time. I enjoyed sports very much, especially track and field and football. I was a gifted sprinter and had hoped to become an accomplished athlete. Of course, this never happened. I coped quite well for a time but once I married and became a father I started to struggle mentally as well as physically. When my son was still very young (around 18 months old) I had to inject myself with Interferon B three times per day. The side effects of this treatment were sometimes unbearable. I was so ill I spent most weekends in bed. I did not have a staff job so I did not get paid when I was on sick-leave so I had to work throughout this treatment. Government Sickness Benefit was insufficient to pay our mortgage, never mind the bills. When I wasn't at work I was in bed. I saw very little of my wife and baby son during this time. My greatest fear was that I had infected my wife with Hepatitis C and this was why my son had been born prematurely. I worried that he also could be infected, having no real understanding of my condition it was a torment to me to think I may have given my young family this terrible disease.

17. In 2017 I started to have a problem with my right hand and my right shoulder. I consulted a GP at the Medical Rainbow Centre, GRO-C GRO-C (I think she was a temporary doctor; I cannot remember her name). Fortunately this doctor noticed that my records showed evidence of Hepatitis C. She informed me that trigger finger can be linked to liver function and I should have a blood test as soon as possible. This test showed I was still Hepatitis C positive. I was devastated to receive this news as I knew the virus would have continued to attack my body for decades. The Interferon B had obviously been unsuccessful and the doctors I had consulted over the years had never advised me to have further blood tests. I am very grateful to this doctor for her attention to detail. If only all GPs were as thorough and professional.

18. I had an operation at St. Helens Hospital, GRO-C, GRO-C on 27.11.2017 (a copy of a letter supporting this information is available). The consultant was Dr. Mani Rathinam. The procedure was described as 'right ring finger A1 pulley release' under local anaesthetic and strict aseptic precautions. I had to take many weeks off work to allow my hand to heal completely. My profession is a LGV Class 1 Driver so this operation resulted in financial loss to me. I had a further operation at St. Helens Hospital on 29.01.2018 described as a 'US Guided injection shoulder Rt'. This procedure again resulted in time off work and financial loss to me.

19. I have received the following treatment for HCV. Numerous blood tests, ultra sounds, Interferon B, biopsy (very bad experience, took 3 attempts, caught rib with needle, went into shock, window wide open, nurse tipped bed wrong way and I fell partway out of the hospital window (3rd floor Whiston Hospital). When my wife arrived, she was questioned about my usual level of blood pressure. Was it low, similar to an Olympic Athlete? What was it when he arrived she asked? *Don't know, didn't bother with vitals* was summary of eventual answer. Farce! I was on Zepatier in 2018 to treat the virus a second time (a copy of Blood Report dated 23.04.2018 is available to support this information). My viral load was 888000 IU/ml at this time.

20. Zepatier was available for the treatment of my condition long before it was offered to me. On the day I attended Warrington Hospital to collect my prescription I was told that it may not be in their dispensary because if an inmate of a prison was diagnosed at the same time as I was then the NHS funding would have been reallocated to the prisoner. This beggars belief! (if possible, I would like assurance from the Inquiry that this practise will be investigated).

21. I should have been offered counselling and emotional support. I was never offered any support and was not even made aware of The Hepatitis C Trust or the Skipton Fund.

22. All of the treatments I have received have been unpleasant, but the Interferon B was truly terrible. I was physically and mentally drained for months if not years after the treatment. The Zepatier was a much less traumatic treatment because it was in tablet form. However, it made me depressed, anxious and affected my ability to sleep well. I am currently still having problems with insomnia and depression

23. I have always hated that my files are stamped "DANGER OF INFECTION". Not all medical practitioners have a good understanding of the Hepatitis C virus so sometimes dental nurses or nurses generally cannot hide their fear of treating me. Maybe it is time to put that right by having seminars as soon as possible to improve this lack of understanding. I resent this attitude by any NHS employee, especially as the NHS is entirely responsible for my condition. The Blue Badge Scheme implemented in Ireland would be a way to indicate to all medical personnel that I have contracted this disease because the NHS gave me contaminated blood, not because I am an alcoholic, a drug user or live a high-risk lifestyle. The Blue Badge Scheme would hopefully lead to me being treated with more respect and sympathy instead of fear and suspicion.

24. I have already commented on these issues earlier in my statement, but I will give further details below.

25. My social life was non-existent during the early nineties. I needed to avoid alcohol so the easiest way to do this was to decline invitations to social events where alcohol would be served. I did not want to explain why I could not drink as I did not want my friends and work colleagues to be aware of my condition due to the stigma that surrounded HCV at the time. Unfortunately, due to a general lack of understanding about HCV, a lot of my peers confused it with HIV.

26. As for my family life, I did not have the energy most days to play with my son when he was very young, and I will always feel guilty and upset about what my son and I never got to experience together. My parents did not understand my condition even though they did know it was due to the blood I was given during the transfusion I had when I was 14 years old. I let them believe it was far less serious, than in fact it was, because they do not handle stress very well. I shared knowledge of my condition solely with my wife. This put a burden on her and I felt isolated most of the time.

27. As for our private life, the symptoms and problems resulting from my condition have affected nearly every day of my 38 years of marriage. I had to tell my wife that I could not justify having more children now I knew of my condition, as I would probably not live long enough to support her and our son, let alone another baby. My wife agreed not to have another child even though she became very sad when I had a vasectomy at the age of 36. She accepted our circumstances and took on the role of breadwinner. She became the main insured person for our mortgage. We gave up the idea of ever upgrading to a better home. We had never intended to stay in our first house as it is not in the best part of town, but we had to accept that our income could never meet our aspirations to live in a more pleasant area. Trying to move would have involved revealing my condition to an insurer. In the 1990s, when we looked into re-mortgaging our property, the health questions always asked if the person to be insured had ever had a test for HIV. I had, my wife hadn't. We wished to be honest.

28. My wife became very unhappy and depressed following my vasectomy. This led to us separating for a time, but because of the person she is, we got back to together and have tried very hard to make the most of what we have got.

29. I was infected at the age of 14 which meant I was very tired and unwell during the important years of study for my O Level (GCE exams). I believe my results were not as good as they should have been.

30. Due to my worse than average sickness record in the early 1990s, I was made redundant a number of times when I may have kept my job if I hadn't taken sick time. I once revealed my condition to my employer of the time (Palmer & Harvey Wholesalers) after several sickness absences. They nevertheless gave me a disciplinary hearing and a letter that indicated any more absences would lead to my dismissal even though I had a "notifiable" disease. After this incident my mother loaned me the money to take a driving course so that I could become an LGV Class 1 Driver and not have to take such hard, physical warehouse work as that at Palmer & Harvey. It was a huge relief to be able to hand in my notice at Palmer & Harvey because I was aware that I was viewed very differently by many of my colleagues. I believe my condition had not remained confidential.

31. I was not fit enough to work overtime very often so my earnings were often limited to basic pay. My sickness record did not help me to get promotion and take advantage of opportunities available at my different places of work. I felt forced to change my occupation following my treatment at Palmer & Harvey but no financial help was available to me for re-training, so I had to ask my mother for a loan which I found demeaning.

Treatment/Care/Support

32. My GP Surgery (Rainbow Medical Centre) did not have the funding to treat me with Interferon B. If Mr. Faizallah had not been able to include me in his experimental study I would have not been offered any other treatment in 1990.

33. I have NEVER been offered counselling or psychological support.

Financial Assistance

34. I was only made aware, by the special-care nurse at Warrington General Hospital, that financial assistance was available to me when my blood test was again positive for HCV in February 2018 (approximately). I applied to the EIBSS for financial support in April 2018. It had taken many weeks to obtain sufficient medical records and persuade/insist my form was completed by my consultant and GP. The number of phone calls and personal visits I had to make to obtain this information was ridiculous.

35. I received a one-off payment of £20,000 on 15th June 2018, a one-off payment (backdated stage 1) of £666.70 on 15th June 2018 and a first stage 1 payment of £333.33 on 20th June 2018. I have received subsequent payments of £333.33 on the 20th of each month since then (a letter from the EIBSS dated 25th May 2018 is available to support this information). I could not apply for top up payments because my son still lives at home. His salary would be taken into account, in the means testing calculation which exempts my wife and I from top up payments.

36. I had to search on line for the correct scheme to contact. I had been told by the nurse to contact the Skipton Fund, but this fund no longer existed. My wife eventually found details for the EIBSS on-line and contacted them by telephone. They mailed the relevant information and application forms to me. I had to obtain medical records that proved I had been transfused with contaminated blood. I also had to complete a complicated form that required input from my GP and as many Medical Practitioners as could possibly provide supporting information.

37. Neither my GP nor Warrington General Hospital wanted to take responsibility for obtaining these records nor did the EIBSS. As stated above, it took me many weeks to obtain sufficient medical records and persuade/insist my form

was completed by my consultant and GP. The number of phone calls and personal visits I had to make to obtain this information was ridiculous and meant my payments were delayed by 2 months.

38. No preconditions were imposed by the EIBSS on the making of my application for financial assistance.

39. I have been made aware by my wife consulting with The Hepatitis C Trust that the Skipton fund was first set up in 2001. Therefore, I have missed out on funding for at least 17 years. I do not find the staff at the EIBSS particularly helpful. When I finally managed to get my GP and Consultant to co-operate by completing and signing the application form my funding was further delayed by repeated requests for more information. Instead of listing all of the documents required to arrange payment I started to receive letters asking for one document at a time. A blood report to prove I was still HCV Positive. My passport, then proof address etc. I was ready to give up, but my wife contacted the EIBSS to ask for a final list of information that was required because the further delay (and dripping tap approach) was unacceptable.

Additional points

40. I believe the inquiry should be completely transparent. I wish to know which government decided to use untested blood and to prove it was not purely a financial decision as I believe the decision was only financial. I wish to know who signed off on the use of this blood. Who, when, why?

41. I wish to receive a written apology.

42. I wish to receive adequate, non-means tested financial compensation for all of my losses, pain, suffering and life sacrifices this gross negligence by the Department of Health has caused me.

43. I wish to see the timely introduction of the Blue Badge Scheme as used in Ireland.

44. I wish to receive written assurances that a similar tragedy cannot happen again in the future. I wish to be shown a comprehensive action plan that details the preventative measures to be taken by the Department of Health and the NHS to implement this plan.

45. I was diagnosed in 1990. I believe Hepatitis C had been acknowledged as a notifiable virus in 1988. Once I was diagnosed why was I not immediately informed that I was likely to have been infected through contaminated blood and given as much information about the effects of the disease as was known at this time?

46. I still consider I have never been told the whole truth about my condition or its cause. Until I met the special-care nurse at Warrington General Hospital earlier this year I consider I have been "kept in the dark" for nearly five decades (47 years).

47. In 1990 Dr. Fazaillah suggested, because I had holidayed in the former Yugoslavia the previous year (1989), I could have contracted HCV from the dairy products. My wife and in-laws had also consumed the same dairy products, so this idea was obviously very unlikely.

48. It was so difficult to obtain copies of the letters I did manage to acquire that I believe there must be more evidence, associated with the infection, in my file. I wish to see my complete medical history so that I know the whole story.

49. As detailed above, my GP Surgery and my Consultant at Warrington General Hospital, were not at first co-operative when I requested my medical records. My GP and my Consultant became more co-operative when I indicated that if they did not, or could not provide the information I required, then they needed to send me a letter explaining this situation so that I could pass it on to my solicitors, Leigh Day. Even so I had to pay my GP a fee of £24.50 to sign the form. That really is adding insult to injury.

50. Until I encountered the special-care nurse at Warrington General Hospital earlier this year I have usually been treated with suspicion, fear and sometimes contempt by hospital based medical professionals.

51. I received very limited help or advice from my GP surgery. I received no sympathy or apology, and a complete lack of co-operation when I requested my medical records. Without my wife being so persistent I would have given up trying to obtain funding from the EIBSS. I work shifts and find my occupation physically demanding so the last thing I wish to do on my day off is chase documentary evidence. I simply do not have the energy.

52. The only charitable trust I have had contact with is the EIBSS. Although the staff were mostly polite they were not particularly helpful. They would state what information they required but would not participate in aiding me with the acquisition of this paperwork.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C ....

Dated 23 November 2018