

Witness Name: Tracy Gibson

Statement No.: WITN4185001

Exhibits: WITN4185002

Dated: 5th August 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF TRACY GIBSON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 23rd April 2020.

I, Tracy Gibson, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Tracy Isabella Gibson. My maiden name is Falconer. My date of birth is the **GRO-C** 1968 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am married to my husband Andrew Thomas Gibson and we have been married since 1987. We have three children together **GRO-C** **GRO-C** and **GRO-C**. I am a Court Officer at **GRO-C** Sheriff Court and have worked in that role since February of this year. I intend to speak about my father William Hunter Rennie Falconer who was born on the **GRO-C** 1937 and passed away on 5th February 2007 from bronchopneumonia, acute renal failure, multi organ failure and hepatitis C. I exhibit his death certificate as **WITN4185002**. I will speak in particular about the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment he received and the impact it had on his and our lives together as a family.

2. I do not wish to remain anonymous for this statement.

Section 2. How Affected

3. My Dad was quite a character, he could always hold a room. He was a very active person and liked to keep fit but that became harder for him as his health deteriorated. He loved gardening and spent almost all of his time in the garden pottering around doing things. He also kept pigeons most of his life, but had to give those up because of the risk of infection they posed to him in his later years. He was just a very happy person, he never blamed anyone for his situation and didn't like to complain. Before his infection in 1980, Dad worked in insurance and was about to set up his own insurance company. After he became ill, that all fell apart. After he rehabilitated himself he worked as a storeman at the T.A. Base in Montrose, until he died. Dad and I were very close, we had a very strong bond and I miss him a great deal.
4. In December 1980 Dad was found to be suffering with meningococcal septicaemia. This led to him being admitted into intensive care at Ninewells Hospital, Dundee for nine weeks. He was unconscious for six or seven of those weeks and his condition was dire. There was one occasion where we were told that he was brain dead and the machines were turned off, but he managed to pull through. During those nine weeks he was given numerous blood transfusions and as a result, he contracted hepatitis C from one of these transfusions. I cannot say exactly how many blood transfusions he had but I know that he received at least three full blood transfusions. The blood transfusions were necessary, because the meningococcal septicaemia was causing his body to shut down and they needed to replace his blood frequently, to keep him alive. I cannot remember the name of the doctor that was in charge of his care at this time, but I know it was the same doctor in the intensive care ward in Ninewells that looked after Dad when he died in 2007.
5. Dad was never given any information or advice about the risk of infection posed by the blood transfusions.

6. In the 1990s Dad started to become very unwell and was in and out of hospital a lot in during that time. He was having recurring bouts of fevers and tremors and often suffered from flu like symptoms. This led to him being admitted to the infectious diseases ward at Ninewells under the care of Dr Nathwani for an entire week in 1999. During that week they performed every possible test you could imagine on him to see what was causing his symptoms and they found nothing. There was no mention of hepatitis C at all.
7. In 2003, Dad's GP, Dr Chung, at the Abbey Health Centre, Arbroath suggested that Dad should be tested for hepatitis C as the symptoms he had been experiencing, were still persisting. Those blood tests were done shortly afterwards and it was found immediately that Dad did in fact have hepatitis C. I cannot say whether those tests were performed by Dr Chung or whether Dad was referred to Ninewells for testing.
8. I am not sure whether it was Dr Chung or someone at Ninewells who gave my Dad his diagnosis in 2003.
9. At his diagnosis appointment, he was told that he had contracted hepatitis C and that it had come from receiving infected blood. I think they gave him quite a lot of information about the infection at his diagnosis. They gave him a booklet called "Taking Control" which detailed a lot about the infection. This booklet explained the symptoms, the possible treatments and lot of other information.
10. I think the information about my Dad's infection should have been found much earlier than 2003. How his hepatitis C infection could have been missed during his week of testing in 1999 is a complete mystery.
11. I think Dad's diagnosis was a bit vague in the sense that it had been having such a huge effect on him for so long, there was very little explanation. There wasn't at that time any justification as to why it had been left undiscovered for so long.

12. Mum was asked to come in for testing after Dad's diagnosis, so there was definitely some discussion with him about cross infection. They said that the chance of cross infection to my Mum was very unlikely and I think they mentioned things like keeping cuts covered and not sharing toothbrushes.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I am not aware of Dad having contracted any other infections other than hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

14. When Dad was in intensive care with meningococcal septicaemia in 1980, he was unconscious for around six or seven weeks. He received many different tests and treatments during that time that he was not aware of.
15. The nine weeks in intensive care in 1980 would have been the only time my Dad could have been treated without his consent, but my Mum was there to give her consent on his behalf to any testing or treatment he required.
16. It is possible that Dad was tested for the purposes of research but I cannot say exactly when that would have occurred.

Section 5. Impact

17. Mentally the infection was very stressful for Dad. The infection made him more ill than he already was and I think that had a huge effect on him psychologically. He also knew that the infection could kill him if he didn't receive effective treatment and I know that was something that weighed on him. Dad also struggled with coming to terms with the infection initially, he had it unknowingly for so long, that it was just a lot for him to take in.
18. The infection ravaged Dad's health. He would have extremely high fevers and he would suffer from very bad tremors. He dealt with quite bad nausea a lot of

the time as well. I remember he would often completely lose his appetite and have no energy to do anything and that led to him losing weight. He also would have pain in his joints and that made it difficult for him to walk. Dad was just generally poorly for years.

19. Dad developed gout after he was diagnosed and would sometimes have numbness in his hands and feet. I cannot say for certain whether the infection caused those problems.
20. Dad received Interferon and Ribavirin to treat his hepatitis C. He received this treatment under the care of Professor John Dillon at Ninewells Hospital and the treatment ran from 10th November 2003 to 11th October 2004. I do not know if this treatment was successful. I personally don't think it was, it might have given Dad a few more years, but I think by that time, the infection had already done too much damage.
21. I am not aware of Dad having faced any difficulties in accessing treatment.
22. I do not believe there were any other treatments Dad could have received. Interferon and Ribavirin was the only treatment available at that time that I am aware of.
23. The treatment had a huge effect on Dad psychologically. He became quite a recluse and didn't really want to see anyone. He basically had no social life at all and was very withdrawn.
24. The treatment seemed to effect his balance quite a bit and he had trouble walking because of it. As well as that, the joint pain he suffered from became worse during treatment, and in general his mobility was very poor. I remember he would often feel so nauseous during the treatment that he would have to go to bed. I cannot remember how else the treatment impacted him physically, but I remember him just being very ill during that time.
25. I am not aware of Dad's infection having any impact on his treatment for anything else medical or dental.

26. Dad's infection impacted on his family life because his health affected us all. He was very ill for years and spent a lot of time in and out of hospital. This took away from the time he could have spent with his family. He missed out on so many experiences with the family, birthdays, holidays and family gatherings. The state of his health took these moments away from him.
27. Dad's infection had a huge impact on me as well. He died far too young and he was desperately ill in the years before he died. When he died I remember we were all so sad, but angry as well. Angry because Dad had this infection for so many years and it had gone undetected. The doctors should have found it sooner. A lot of that anger also came from the fact that he was given infected blood in the first place without it being tested. We were latterly told that a lot of the blood that Dad received, had come from America. We now know that a lot of that blood had come from prisoners and drug addicts and that just feels criminal. The impact of this for me has been years of sadness and anger thinking about what happened.
28. When Dad died, it was horrible, it was sad and stressful on the whole family. We all miss having him in our lives every day. I remember in the last few weeks of his life in hospital at Ninewells in 2007, the staff still wouldn't say that it was hepatitis C that Dad was suffering from. He was dying and I think the hospital staff were just keeping him on the ward and wait for him to pass away. I insisted that he be moved to intensive care. The doctor in charge of the intensive care ward when Dad was moved there, said to us when he died that hepatitis C was the cause of his death. It was the same doctor that treated my Dad in intensive care in 1980 but I cannot remember his name.
29. The family has been affected by the stigma of hepatitis C. When you mention hepatitis to people, they do make assumptions about the infection. There has always been an association between the infection and drug taking and that has meant it was something you didn't always feel comfortable talking to people about.

30. Dad managed to work through most of his infection until he stopped working for the T.A. in 2006, but he had to take time off every now and again. He needed the time just because of how often he would need to go into hospital. Luckily his work were very understanding and they knew about his infection.
31. The days he took off I'm sure would have had an impact financially, but I cannot say exactly to what extent.

Section 6. Treatment, Care and Support

32. I do not believe Dad ever faced any difficulties in accessing treatment care or support because of his infection.
33. No counselling or psychological support was ever offered to Dad. The staff nurse at Ninewells, Jan Tait, who looked after Dad, always offered him support if he needed it though. I think Dad would have benefited from some kind of counselling if it had been offered, it would have really helped my Mum as well. It would have just helped them process everything that was going on. It would have helped them to come to terms with everything and maybe deal with a lot of the anger that had built up over the years.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. Dad received £45,000 from the Skipton Fund in 2005. Unfortunately by that time, he was too ill to really enjoy it. The only thing he bought with that money was a large TV, about a month before he died. The Skipton Fund called my Mum in 2013 and told her that Dad was entitled to another £25,000 from the fund. They did not know that he had died. The amount was paid to my Mum as his next of kin.
35. I am not sure how Dad found out about the Skipton Fund. From what I remember, the application for the fund was not the easiest thing, it was quite intricate from what Mum and Dad said about it. They also mentioned that it

was quite a long process applying to the fund. I don't remember Dad having any difficulties with his application though.

36. My Mum currently receives around £1,000 a month from SIBSS. I am not sure when those payments began. I believe SIBSS got in touch with my Mum about her entitlement to financial assistance, I do not know exactly when they got in contact with her. Mum has not spoken to me about the application process so I would not be able to say what that was like for her. She did not mention having any difficulties in applying to the fund though.
37. I think applying to the funds can be quite confusing and the applications can be quite a lot for people to deal with. Mum can't really deal with the letters she receives from SIBSS because they are too much for her. When I have looked at them myself, I have found them quite confusing at points.

Section 8. Other Issues

38. I think the fact that Dad's infection wasn't identified by the hospital in 1999, was unacceptable. He was in there for an entire week and they performed so many tests that I cannot understand how the infection was not found.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed  Tracy Gibson (Aug 6, 2020 15:30 GMT+1)

Dated Aug 6, 2020