

Witness Name: Lesley Comstive

Statement No.: WITN5346001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 17 MARCH 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LESLEY COMSTIVE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 12 February 2021.

I, Lesley Comstive, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Lesley Comstive. My date of birth is GRO-C 1945 and my address is
GRO-C I am a retired University Lecturer at Derby University. I live with my husband and we have lived in GRO-C for the past 24 years.
2. I intend to speak about my late father Lesley Howard Kirkham, who was born on GRO-C 1912 and sadly passed away in July 2000, at the age of 87. He was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV), as a result of receiving blood products to treat Von Willebrand's Disease, in his case a mild form of Haemophilia.
3. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment received and the impact it had on him and our lives together.

4. I confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me with my statement.
5. I no longer have any medical records and am relying on memory, so my recollection of dates may be slightly hazy.

Section 2. How Infected

6. My father, Lesley Howard Kirkham was born with Von Willebrand's Disease, a mild form of haemophilia. His father was also a sufferer of the bleeding disorder and passed away when my father was 7 years old – he bled to death after an operation.
7. My father did not bruise and did not suffer with any joint bleeds, but he could bleed very badly.
8. When he married my mother, Doris Hilda Kirkham, no operations were feasible and he was prone to hernias. As such, I grew up helping my mother with any heavy lifting. I was an only child, a choice my parents made due to my father's condition.
9. My father finished up as production director at a textile company in Nottingham where we lived, after starting out as a designer. His bleeding disorder never really disadvantaged his working life.
10. When I was 12/13 years old, my father had the prospect of having to have teeth removed. This was a major problem due to his von Willibrands. To have some teeth removed meant a major operation at hospital.
11. My parents were very private and did not openly discuss medical issues, but after this I realised there was a problem. Some bleeding tests were carried out and the doctors were mystified over how some of the cuts healed up quickly and others did not. I recall my father commenting that he had his own type of bleeding disorder and referred to it as the 'Kirkham version'

12. In the late 1970s, it was decided that it would be safer to remove all of his remaining teeth in one go. The procedure was successful and we were told that a new treatment was used. It is possible this could have been Factor VIII, but I do not know for certain.
13. After the removal of his teeth, my father had two hernia operations in the late 1970s/ early 80s and again they went well. My mother and I were informed that Factor VIII was used to aid clotting, but we were never made aware of any risks associated with the blood product.
14. I was unaware of any treatment my father received other than Factor VIII. I have been asked by the Inquiry Investigator if cryoprecipitate was ever used, but I never heard it mentioned.
15. In the late 1980s, my father had some polyps removed from his bladder at Nottingham City Hospital. He was a very fit and lean man for his age and should only have been kept in hospital for a day or two, but he ended up staying for a month. I was working and had two children at the time, so would take my mother to the hospital for visiting hours after I had picked the children up from school.
16. The doctors wanted him to drink 2 litres of water a day to flush the bladder out, but he was bleeding heavily and becoming weaker. After 3 weeks he was in a desperate state and could not even recognise my mother and I, so we refused to leave the ward until we saw a doctor. We had to wait until the night rounds and eventually spoke to a doctor at 10pm. I insisted that they did something as he was bleeding to death. She took him off in a wheelchair to do some tests and we went back home. I do not know who this doctor was.
17. We could not understand why he kept bleeding and I asked the same doctor, at the same time why he was not being administered with Factor VIII. She remarked that it was contaminated, but did not explain why. We took the implication that it was contaminated with HIV, simply because this was the mid-eighties and AIDs was very much in the news.

18. The men's urological ward was the busiest ward in the hospital and that may have been why my father slipped through the net, but my mother and I were very upset and angry that he was left to deteriorate for so long until the doctors took his condition seriously. He was almost gone. I do not know if my father was given any different treatment after the tests, or just restricted in his fluid intake to a quarter of a pint per day to stop the bleeding. He was eventually sent home on Christmas Eve, but I had to rush him back in on Christmas Day because he had a blockage.
19. My father was diagnosed with HCV in the mid 1990s. I do not know how he was diagnosed, but I am aware that he had a good relationship with his GP. It was very worrying – it was another nail in the coffin along with the other conditions he had.
20. I do not recall my parents ever relaying to me any information concerning infection management.

Section 3. Other Infections

21. As far as I am aware, my father did not contract any other infections other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood products.

Section 4. Consent

22. As far as I am aware, my father was not treated or tested without consent.

Section 5. Impact

23. My father knowingly had HCV for the last 5 years of his life. I think the virus was beginning to attack his liver, but this had not advanced to liver cirrhosis. I am not aware of him ever having any liver scans or biopsies.
24. He did not appear to be jaundice and his complexion was not obviously yellow.

25. I think he was angry about the fact that he was given infected blood products. He had to battle all the way through his life due to his bleeding disorder and he was infected with a virus that deteriorated his quality of life.
26. My father went into a downward spiral after the diagnosis – he did not feel very well and was often fatigued.
27. I am not aware of my father being offered any treatment to clear his HCV infection and based on what I have been told of how severe the treatment was at the time, I do not believe that he received any treatment. We were a very close family – my parents lived ten doors down the road. They would help with childcare and we would holiday together in Cornwall – I would have known if my father was taking any medication to treat the infection. In any case I would have been involved in the transportation for hospital visits.
28. Heart failure is stated as the cause of death on my father's death certificate. He had a leaky heart valve and decided to go ahead with an operation to correct it. During the pre-op appointment he asked the surgeon if he would go ahead with the operation if he (my dad) was his father, to which the surgeon replied "no". My father therefore asked to be wheeled back out and did not go ahead with the procedure. The prognosis was that he would live to see the millennium, but he would not make it through it to the next year. We had hoped that he would see my parent's Golden Anniversary in the December but he passed away in July 2000. The prognosis was very accurate.
29. I do not think my father experienced any problems with dental care after his diagnosis with HCV. All of his teeth had been removed, but he still had appointments for his dentures.
30. As I said earlier in this statement, my parents were very private so would not have told anyone about my father's HCV infection and as a result we never experienced any stigma associated with the virus.
31. My mother dealt well with the haemophilia, but my father's infection with HCV ground her down. He was steadily becoming more unwell and it was affecting what

he could eat. After being told that Factor VIII was contaminated, she was also afraid that there would be no treatment available if he had any bleeds.

32. I am not aware if my mother was ever being tested for HCV, she passed away in 2014.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

33. I am not aware of my father being offered any counselling or psychological support in relation to his HCV infection.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. Before my father died, there was some talk about compensation for those who received infected blood and blood products and a government investigation. He was contacted by an organisation (quite possibly the Haemophilia Society) to see if he wanted to participate in a class action, but much to my mother's annoyance he did not want to be involved.
35. After my father passed away I read something about a compensation scheme for victims of contaminated blood. I discussed what I had read with my mother and she wanted me to find out more. She was in a care home at the time, so I applied on her behalf. I had Power of Attorney for her.
36. I could not specifically remember when I made the application to the Skipton Fund, but I have been told by the Inquiry Investigator that it was submitted in 2011. I recall writing to Dr Dolan from the Haematology Department at the Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital. He endorsed the fact that my father received blood products as a result of his haemophilia.
37. I did have some difficulty in obtaining the medic's endorsement, but I faced no problems with the application and I felt that Skipton was efficient in processing the claim.

38. I know that a payment was received, but I do not recall how much it was. It would have been made to my mother, but as her Power of Attorney. I had control of her bank accounts. The money was used to pay towards her home fees.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. I think it was unfortunate that the blood was contaminated, but I do not think the NHS is to blame.
40. I am angered by the cover up and the fact that infected blood and blood products were still used for many years, despite knowledge that they were contaminated.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 17/03/21