

15-8-2019

Witness Name: Georgina Ann Jefferies

Statement No.: WITN0093424

Exhibits: Nil

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GEORGINA ANN JEFFERIES

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 19 June 2019.

I, Georgina Ann Jefferies, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Georgina Ann Jefferies. My date of birth and my address are known to the Inquiry. I am married and I have two sons. I used to work at a local Council and I am now retired, although I do help out at the reception of a priory hospital.
2. I intend to speak about my father, George Fredrick Rencher, who passed away in October 1984, aged seventy, after receiving an infected blood transfusion.
3. In particular, the nature of his illness, how he became infected, how the illness affected him and led him to a sudden death, and the impact this had on my family and me.

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. My brother, Roy George Rencher, who has given evidence to the Inquiry too, also assists me, as these events took place over thirty years ago.

Section 2. How Infected

5. My father was born on GRO-C 1914 and he married my mother Gladys on 23 December 1944. He had always been a healthy man; he worked as an assembler until he was sixty-five, when he retired. He never had any blood disorder in the past. He never had any blood disorder in the past and he had never received any blood products before he started to have blood transfusion in 1984.
6. On Christmas day 1983, he started feeling unwell. I remember that he did not eat his dinner and went home very early; it was very strange of him. After this episode, everything changed: it was like he did not feel like doing anything, he was always languid and he kept saying that he was sweating a lot.
7. In January 1984, he went to see our family GP, Dr Sankrayga; he was feeling really tired and he had sores in his mouth. The GP sent him to do some blood tests, which showed that his blood count was really low. We therefore took him to the General Hospital in Birmingham, where further tests were conducted.
8. My father was diagnosed with what they called a "pre-leukaemia condition". I remember that at the time, we did not understand what this meant as nobody explained to us what it was and what it entailed. To treat this condition, my father was told that he had to receive blood transfusions every four to six weeks at the hospital. I remember that my brother and my mother would drive him to the General Hospital in Birmingham to receive the transfusions. After every treatment, he would always come back home feeling much better.

9. During this period the doctors kept on running regular check-ups but no other treatment was prescribed; my father did not have to take any tablets, only transfusions.
10. One day, around June/July 1984, I went to pick him up from the hospital after his transfusion, but I was told that he couldn't come home with me. He had a temperature and he had developed what appeared to be large red wounds all over his body, so he had to stay overnight in hospital. We were told that it seemed like he had a bad reaction to a blood transfusion. I had the impression that the doctors did not seem to know what was actually going on. When he felt better, my mother took him home, but she had to take him to hospital again at the end of the summer, in September 1984.
11. During all this period, nobody ever explained to us what was going on and we were never given any clear diagnosis of my father's condition.
12. I don't remember the exact date, but I recall that at a certain point, my mother came home from the hospital telling us that she had just met a consultant that had come on purpose from London to visit my father. She didn't know the name of the specialist but she told us that he asked her: "Do you know why your husband is ill?". She replied to the consultant that no, she didn't know what he had. At that point the doctor simply informed her of the fact that my father had received a contaminated blood transfusion.
13. Once she referred me that, I remember that asked her what sort of contaminated blood the specialist was talking about but she replied "I don't know, that's all he said to me". This was all we knew about my father's infection: he had received infected blood.
14. I have to say that my mother was a very private person; she has always considered doctors and medical staff like authorities, the kind of people that you listen to, without asking any question or without raising any doubt. To my mum, that was it; my father had received infected blood and the consultant

hadn't given her any further details or explanation about what would have happened in the future or whether my father had to undergo any treatment.

15. That was it for her, but not for me. I had so many unanswered questions in my mind. With hindsight, I wish I had gone with my mother to meet the consultant from London, as I believe I would have been able to understand what he told her and I could have asked further questions. But that was the first and last time that someone in my family met or talked with that specialist and life simply went on.
16. After this episode, out of the blue, in early October 1984, we received a call from the hospital asking us to come in as my father was very ill. When my mother and my brother arrived at the hospital, they were told that he had passed away. I went to the hospital too.
17. I remember that I had bought a dressing gown for his birthday but I ended up giving it to a homeless man, who had previously shared with my father a room at the hospital. He was dead and we couldn't have done anything for him.
18. The cause of death on his death certificate was septicaemia. However, to this day, my family and I have never been told what really happened to my father. I do not know whether an autopsy was conducted or not and why he died. Nobody told us anything.
19. We were not aware of any risk of infections from blood transfusion and blood products at the time. However, one day I saw Princess Diana on TV talking to a man who had contracted HIV and who had bruises all over his body, and I remember I thought "Dad was like that". I wondered whether the infection the consultant had mentioned to my mother was in fact HIV, and I told my husband "I think that's what it is, Dad had HIV". After this, my brother and I discussed many times this possibility, that my father had been actually infected with HIV, but we never acted on it until today.

20. To the best of my knowledge, my mother, my brother and I were never tested for HIV or Hepatitis. My mother died of a heart attack aged ninety.

Section 3. Other Infections

21. To the best of my knowledge, I am not sure which type of infection or infections my father contracted through his contaminated blood transfusion.

Section 4. Consent

22. My father consented to receiving blood transfusions, but I do not believe this was informed consent, as he never received appropriate information about any of the risks of contamination.

23. I do not think he was ever told that his blood had been tested for any infections, and as such, never consented to this.

24. To the best of my knowledge, I do not think my father was ever tested for the purpose of research.

Section 5. Impact

25. My father has been very affected by his condition. When wounds started to appear on his body, his mood really went down and he became another man. He was depressed and he did not want to talk to anybody. When he was admitted to hospital for the last time, before his death, we do not know why but he was put in a separate ward: there was nobody there and in addition to his very fragile state of mind, he also felt lonely. He seemed to know that he was going to die. I don't know why they basically put him in isolation; nobody gave us any explanation.

26. When the wounds appeared on his body, he also started to be in a lot of pain. He never showed me the wounds, but one day, when he was in hospital, I

touched his arm and he took it back as even that simple physical contact was painful to him.

27. My father's condition had a great impact on my mother. No one gave her any explanation nor information so she never understood what actually happened. After seeing the consultant from London, she asked to take my father home but she was told that she couldn't as the consultant thought she could have not been able to cope. 'Again, she was not told or explained what she would have not coped with but she was really upset that she could not take him home and care for him, herself.

28. This situation was really difficult for me. I had two small children at the time, and I was always back and forth to the hospital to see my father. Seeing my father's condition becoming worse and worse and then seeing him dying so quickly has definitely traumatised me.

29. I was recently diagnosed with breast cancer, and I had to undertake many blood tests. I hate to go to the hospital, I hate tests and every time, I cannot help wondering whether I will get contaminated as well.

30. My father's condition and death, also had a huge impact on my two sons; my mother was looking after them whilst I was at work and when I was with them she could stay with my father at the hospital. Even if they were young, my sons could understand that grandpa was not feeling well at all and things were getting worse and worse. It was very difficult for them.

31. I do not recall what my father's treatment consisted of when he was last admitted into hospital. However, I remember seeing three small files of medicines in his room, and asking the nurse what these were for. She said it was just to help him, but I understood from her that this would not cure him and it was only some sort of palliative care.

32. I never really spoke to anyone apart from my family about what happened to my father. I remember that just once, I mentioned to my colleagues at work

that my father had received infected blood and one of them commented: "Oh keep away from me then!". I tried to explain that this happened many years ago but it didn't make any difference. Apart from this episode, I never suffered of any stigma as a result of my father's contamination.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

33. To the best of my knowledge, I do not recall my father facing any obstacles or difficulties in accessing treatment, but I am not sure which treatment he was undergoing, at the time.

34. As I already mentioned above, when he was last admitted to hospital, he was put in a separate room far from all the other patients, in a side ward far from the general one. I remember that I saw the nurses who were changing his bedding, putting the sheets in a plastic bag before throwing it away. The nurses and doctors also always used to wear masks around my him, but I have no idea why.

35. Neither my father nor I were ever offered any counselling or psychological support.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

36. As my father was never officially diagnosed with any infection, we did not receive any financial assistance from any of the Trusts and Funds set up to assist people infected with HIV or Hepatitis, and their families.

Section 8. Other Issues

37. I have not been involved in any litigation or campaigning groups.

38. I have been asked if I have any expectation from this Inquiry. I would like to know what really happened to my father. I am looking for answers, I want to find out what actually happened to him. In particular I want someone to tell me:

- Was my father contaminated with HIV or HCV as a result of a blood transfusion?
- If this is the case and the doctors new about it, why did they not tell us anything?
- Why was he put in a side ward in a separate bedroom?
- Why wasn't my mother allowed to take him home and care for him?
Was this because the doctors were actually worried about possible cross-contamination to her and her children?

39. I hope this Inquiry will not be a stumbling block and that we will obtain the answers we have waited for the past thirty years.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

15/8/2019