

Witness Name: Paul French
Statement No.: WITN3690001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 8/1/2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PAUL FRENCH

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 6 November 2019.

I, Paul French, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Paul French. My date of birth is GRO-C 1973 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am the son of Sheila French (W3297) who has also given a statement to the Inquiry. I intend to speak about being raised by my mother who was infected by Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of her illness, how the illness affected her and the impact it had on her, my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Affected

2. My mother was infected with Hepatitis C after my birth. She had a Postpartum Haemorrhage and was given a blood transfusion.
3. The Inquiry has my mother's statement which covers her treatment and illness. I will therefore not go into explicit details regarding her medical history but will instead focus on how my mother's illness has affected my family and me.
4. I was first made aware of Hepatitis C in 1990/1. I was called into my doctor's surgery for a blood test. I was just told to go to Doctor Rumian was my doctor and I thought nothing of it when he told me to come in to get checked. I would have been about 17 and at College.
5. It then became known that my mother had Hepatitis C. I didn't really know much about it. But the years that followed were difficult. She had treatment for her Hepatitis C about 5 years after her diagnosis and eventually after many years, she was able to clear the virus. Looking back, the years preceding the diagnosis were difficult also.

Section 3. Other Infections

6. In 2012, my mother was diagnosed with liver Cancer brought on from Hepatitis C. For a few years the Cancer had cleared. But in summer 2020 the Cancer returned, due to the damage the Hepatitis C did to her Liver and Lymph system.

Section 4. Consent

7. I do not believe she gave consent for a blood transfusion at the time of my birth.

Section 5. Impact

Pre-diagnosis

8. As a small child I was aware at only 3 or 4 years old that my mother was different to other mothers. Her behaviour could be strange. I didn't have a bad childhood as such, but I would see things I should not have seen. I saw behaviours that I thought were strange and upsetting. She had suicidal tendencies and overreacted. I saw things that in reality, parents would not want their children to see.
9. There was so much impact on our lives: family life, external relations, order in family life, and conventional family normality were all significantly affected. We were fortunate that my grandparents were alive and local.
10. Looking back, the support that we as a family received from my grandparents was critical. I only wish that they also obtained the answers that took us so long to receive.
11. As a youngster I would see my father in difficult times and trying to hold it all together. This led to me thinking that my mother was a bad mother and resenting her sometimes. Looking back, I can see that these behaviours were a direct result of the disease and she was not well.
12. My father was very worried. I remember father said she is on drugs to try and cure her and that they are awful. He was always trying to work out how and why she reacted the way she did. But I switched off and didn't want to know too much. It was quite selfish perhaps, but it was my way of dealing with it, especially at that age.

13. The 'dark cloud' was perhaps worse when she had Cancer. This was the darkest time. Me being my positive self I was able to deal with it, but I cannot imagine what my father and sister were going through. I put it in a 'box' and left it there. She had Hepatitis C and had Cancer simultaneously. It seemed that there was no way forward and so my way of dealing with it was to remain positive for the sake of the family.

Post-Cure

14. She never really drank alcohol which helped her. About 5 years ago, she had the Harvoni treatment which was amazing, and it seemed to be a cure. Her Hepatitis C was as good as cured and that was a gigantic relief.

15. Now she is cured of the disease it seems that she has now worked things out historically, a bit like a fog has cleared. She would ask me now, "oh you left home because of me?" or make reference to past behaviours and the resultant effect of those behaviours.

16. That's when I became more understanding of the history of the disease that my mother endured. However, the physical and mental effects of the treatments on her were incredibly difficult for her and for those around her. I do not think anyone should underestimate just how damaging that episode was, let alone the entire lifetime of effect on both my mother and those around her. I suspect that these drugs have caused lasting damage.

17. From my early childhood to my thirties I thought that she was a difficult person. Fundamentally the shift in my thinking was when she was cured, I was able to get to know the mother that I never had. It meant I didn't really know her before. There is some guilt now about my potentially apparent nonchalant attitude as a child. As an older man I am acutely conscious now, of the devastating effect the disease had on her and my father, and secondarily on my sister and the extended family.
18. The fact that she had Hepatitis C and had no idea was so hard to deal with. There was clearly something wrong for a long time, without any knowledge that a problem was very much in existence. She had Hepatitis C for 16-17 years undiagnosed, and then spent the next 20 years being treated and dealing with the mental and physical results and finally being cured only in the last 5 years.
19. It has been quite remarkable as in the last few years, I, and others are only realising that her being cured, has meant that we are seeing a different person emerge from the damage that the disease caused physically and emotionally for so long. This has essentially been all my sister's and my life, and pretty much as long as my parents have been married. That is a long sentence for the family, especially for an episode that was beyond the control and influence of all concerned.
20. She is now very different and I'm getting to know a mother I just didn't know before. We think the same way. We didn't think the same way before the infection. It's funny now as I say to myself, "wow I think I am just like my mother".
21. Seeing my mother cure from the infection, and how she dealt with it was remarkable. She worked throughout her illness despite being unwell and not aware of it. She was emotionally and physically drained and tried to lead a normal life in her eyes.

22. The effects of the illness became clear, post cure when I saw her changing and becoming the person I never knew. She seems much "better" now, has normal conversations and I am getting to know her.
23. We need to take something positive from all of this. The fact that she didn't get HIV/AIDS and the fact that her husband and her children were not infected are certainly positives. Otherwise, we all know that the outcome could have been very different. She also lived long enough to get diagnosed with Cancer, being operable and treatable, and then being able to be cured for a period of time. It is remarkable that she is still alive.
24. She is mentally recovering now, and you can see that she is better generally but there are still some dark days. Physically however her recovery is less good. However, she is actually *living* life and not having a dark cloud over her all the time. Life is better but the damage that the disease did will always remain, physically and emotionally, both for her and her family and we will never know what might have been if she was not infected.
25. Looking back, from being a young child, through teenage years, a young adult and now middle aged and now thinking objectively about our life together and the evolution of how the disease affected all our lives, the landscape is clear to me. Although the damage remains and the effects of the disease will never fully repair or recover, I have a clear visibility of how the disease affected us all over the last 46 years.
26. Recently as a family we spoke about whether I felt some level of responsibility or guilt as the blood transfusion that resulted in her infection was due to my birth. The fact is, I do not feel that level of guilt and never have, but I am saddened to think that others in my family might have been concerned that I was burdened with a level of guilt for my lifetime.

27. Over the 46 years it has affected my father possibly the most. It is only now that I look back and see that it has been horrific on him and he has been left feeling very damaged by the episode.
28. My mother was affected so badly, and it was my father who had to pick up the pieces. I witnessed his slow decline in terms of friendships, business life, relationships with extended family members who did not understand the issues that my mother was going through.
29. I think the other side of the family saw her as a bad person. That resulted in one side of my family splitting off and clearly wanting nothing to do with us. But that's my opinion and I agree it can be considered to be subjective, but it didn't help family matters. That side of the family is very conservative, and they wouldn't accept her behaviour. This accelerated the wedge between the family and us.
30. It was my father that lost out the most, he is the most affected from a third-party perspective. He is the unsung hero. He dealt with the mood swings, and the inability of making decisions. He was pulled in so many directions, like running a business and looking after the family that he found it hard to focus and deal with all the health issues affecting my mother that were brought about from the disease.
31. Sometimes I would have conversations with my mum, something simple for example it might be "where are you going on holidays?". But there would never be a level of conclusion, and you couldn't reason with her. We never got anywhere in conversations, often just a fog of confusion and no conclusion. It meant my father could never reason with his spouse, as you could never get to a point of conclusion on many things, often simple but critical things. However, since the disease has left, that cloud seems to have lifted somewhat.

32. I now subsequently understand that many of these issues were the direct result of Hepatitis C, specifically brain fog, depression, disorganised thinking and confusion.

33. My younger sister also saw behaviours that I wish she had not seen. She is less resilient, and this has had an effect on her. The way our mother behaved sometimes with suicidal intentions, you wouldn't want your daughter or anyone to see.

34. I look at my dad and I think that he is the biggest loser in all of this from a social, business, financial, family and emotional perspective. In some ways I am most sorry for his loss. Looking back, I can see how the relationship with my mother who was struggling with devastating effects of the disease had such a significant effect on him.

Stigma

35. My mother always thought that Hepatitis C was about sleeping around, taking drugs, and sharing needles. She felt a stigma as she thought one was infected in the same way as HIV/AIDS.

36. I was always careful not to mention my mum's Hepatitis C due to the stigma. But that has changed more recently once people became more aware.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

37. Clearly the manner in which my mother was infected, and the repercussions faced by my family means that the NHS dealt my mother and my family a most grave disservice.

38. When Doctor **GRO-D** told my mother that she had Hepatitis C, he apologised profusely, he suggested that he and other medical staff thought she was perhaps not being truthful about her challenges, perhaps he thought she was making things up.

39. She received access to treatment within the limitations of the NHS and I recall that she seemed to be in and out of hospital on an almost continual basis from the early 90s until very recently. Dad was almost always by her side.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

40. There are people in the world that cannot feed themselves, so I am conscious that there are people far worse off than you or I. But, when my father met my mother, he was a very successful entrepreneur. I was then born shortly afterwards; mother was then infected, and I truly believe that the challenges my father faced due to my mother's infection meant that he was never able to continue to fulfill his potential. We will never know for sure, but I truly believe that the damage to my father has been very damaging indeed.

41. Basic decision making was a challenge. Simple stuff like, "should we re-mortgage?", or "should we buy this piece of furniture?" This is a basic decision making any husband and wife should make easily. He couldn't make these decisions with his wife. Normal decision making with my mother just stopped him and them, fulfilling their potential as my mother was clearly challenged to make decisions. Since her treatment, it is clear that this issue has improved dramatically. Again, it is only in recent times that I see just how the effects of the diseases were so devastating from an emotional perspective on the infected and affected.

42. The small amount of compensation has saved them from poverty. They would have achieved so much more without the devastating effects of this evil disease. They had so many building blocks in place when they got together. They just survived, but they had so many opportunities, they could have achieved so much more because they didn't make decisions that they should have made. We would never have known what otherwise would have been.

43. My mother is better, but her body has been battered, she is still not in great health and I worry which parent goes first. My father relies on my mother from a financial perspective. My mother relies on my father from a living and an emotional perspective.

44. Some years ago, mum said "I have been offered compensation, but if I accept this, I then have to put a lid on this". I mentioned this to them recently and they didn't remember this conversation at all. But I do, clearly. At the time, that really resonated with me, I just thought it was just plain wrong that in return for some poultry compensation, she was unable to talk about her story about how the NHS created, and then covered up such a scandal.

45. I have realised only recently that it has taken over 40 years of observations to take stock and explain objectively what has happened to my family and the effects that her infection of Hepatitis C had on my mother, father, sister, myself and extended family.

Section 8. Other Issues

46. There are no other issues I would like to discuss.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 8/1/2021