

Witness Name: Foster, Hazel

Statement No.: WITN0941001

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF HAZEL FOSTER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 11 June 2019.

I, Hazel Foster, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Hazel Foster. My date of birth is GRO-C 1957 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a retired hairdresser. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and friends.

Section 2. How Infected

2. I found out that I was infected with Hepatitis C in March or April 2000. I was was forty-two years old.

3.

GRO-C

4. I received a call from the clinic's receptionist informing me that the clinic was unable to treat me because I have Hepatitis C.
5. I had no idea of what Hepatitis C was, let alone that I was infected with it. I asked the receptionist what it meant, but she could not provide me with any information.
6. Shortly after that, I received a letter in the post from the clinic that reflect that I was positive for "HCV Antibody by RIBA". This letter is exhibited as **WITN0941002**.
7. I was very upset – mostly about how this would affect my ability to conceive – so I booked an appointment with my GP.
8. Dr Toy, my GP, did not know much about Hepatitis C and what it meant if I had it. He referred me to the Royal Free Hospital as an outpatient.
9. I saw Dr Dusheiko who did a liver biopsy.
10. I received a letter informing me of the results: I had mild fibrosis and chronic inflammation, and I was HCV RNA positive. The letter also informed me that it was unlikely that I would be eligible for treatment as it was not being funded at that point.
11. It was very disturbing to be diagnosed with a condition that I knew so little about. It was very difficult to find information on how I may have contracted the infection.
12. When I found out through my own research that it was possible to contract Hepatitis C through blood transfusions, I asked my Mum if I may ever have had one.
13. My mum remembered that in 1961, when I was three and three quarters, I had my tonsils and adenoids removed. During the tonsillectomy, I had an acute haemorrhage. I have a record of this – I lost two ounces of blood. This record, a letter to Dr O'Flynn, is marked **WITN0941002**.

14. Mum remembered that I received blood to replace the blood that I lost as a result of the haemorrhage. I do not have a record of this. My records do not show if or how the blood loss was treated.

15. I cannot therefore confirm that I received a transfusion of blood nor that I contracted Hepatitis C in this way.

16. I do know that after the tonsillectomy, I became an anaemic and sickly child. I got nosebleeds a lot. I have never had a tattoo, and only my ears are pierced.

Section 3. Other Infections

17. I do not believe that I have received any infection or infections other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood or blood products.

18. I have been tested for HIV and the other strains of Hepatitis, and I am clear.

Section 4. Consent

19. I do not believe that I have been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent, or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

20. At the time of my diagnosis, my primary concern was conceiving a child. When I think back to that time, I realise how little I knew about what it meant to have Hepatitis C. It was not talked about, and there was very little information available.

21. It seems absurd now that what I was researching was which hospitals would GRO-C to women who had Hepatitis C. I was concerned

about that rather than about making sure that I received treatment for the HCV.

22. When I found out from Dr Toy that Hammersmith Hospital would take me as a patient for [GRO-C] that was where I went. The letter from [GRO-C] [GRO-C] to Dr Toy advising him about Hammersmith Hospital is marked **WITN0941004**.

23. [GRO-C]
I felt very anxious that I should not let this mysterious infection stand in the way of my [GRO-C]

24. It was very lucky, therefore, that I received a letter on 3 April 2002, informing me that my local council had approved the funding of my treatment for Hepatitis C. I was advised to contact the nurses at the Royal Free Hospital, which I did.

25. I never really understood the year-long treatment which I started on 30 September 2002. The treatment – Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin – lasted a year and the effects were far worse than the effects of Hepatitis C that I experienced prior to my being diagnosed!

26. The treatment was horrendous. My thick, curly hair – always my crowning glory – went from curly to straight and became very thin. It has never really recovered.

27. I also gained a lot of weight. It really damaged my confidence.

28. My energy levels were depleted and I felt very low. I had to reduce my working hours to three days a week. Even on the days that I did work, I stopped at three in the afternoon instead of at six. I lost about fifty percent of my earnings for that year.

29. Even when I was working, I feel constantly worried. The nature of hairdressing is that one can easily nick oneself when cutting hair. I became a bit paranoid.

30. I was very lonely. I suppose I hid from my family. That said, I was very lucky to have my husband who was concerned only with getting better and supporting me until I got there.
31. I was put on an antidepressant, Lofepamine. Dr Toy, my GP, was really good at explaining that the treatment was akin to chemotherapy and that it was normal to find it gruelling.
32. I struggled with guilt. I wondered where from and how I had contracted Hepatitis C. I also worried about the fact that I had donated blood regularly from when I was nineteen until well into my thirties. I hated not being able to understand the implications of my infection.
33. Because of the lack of awareness around Hepatitis C, it was difficult to talk to being about my infection. Even when I confided in people, I do not think they really understood what I was going through. For this reason, my social life suffered.
34. It did happen that when I told people that I had Hepatitis C, they assumed that I was a heavy drinker or that I was having an affair. This stigma was difficult to deal with.
35. I was put on thyroxin because the doctors picked up a problem with my thyroid.
36. I was very nauseous and had quite severe joint pain. I developed a cyst on my eye as well as primary intestinal lymphangiectasia, an intestinal disease.
37. Despite feeling so ill during my treatment, I continued because the nurses told me that I was responding well. This is echoed in the letter exhibited as **WITN0941005**. The nurses who dealt with me, Jo Whitehead and Amelia Jameson, were really fantastic.
38. By July 2004, I was told that the treatment had worked and that I was clear of Hepatitis C. This is confirmed in the letter exhibited as

WITN0941006. That letter also notes that I was part of an “expanded access study”. I think that this means that the side effects of the treatment were being monitored and recorded.

39. I was relieved but also felt nervous that the infection would come back. Thankfully, it has not to date. In a letter from April 2010, Dr Dusheiko writes to Dr Toy confirming that I have cleared the virus.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

40. In a way, I posed my own obstacles to obtaining treatment. The first time I was offered treatment was in 2000. I refused because I wanted to continue having my GRO-C treatment, and wanted to give it the greatest possibility of success.

41. Had I understood the disease and the treatment, I doubt that I would have jeopardised GRO-C health by deferring treatment.

42. No counselling was made available to me during my treatment, or ever. It felt like I was alone with a secret disease, and all of my fears and concerns.

43. After the treatment, there was no follow-up.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

44. I have not received any financial assistance. I am aware of the schemes and funds that exist but I have never applied.

45. I have the EIBSS forms and am still deciding whether or not to make an application. I am in contact with the Hepatitis C Trust about this process.

Section 8. Other Issues

46. Sometimes I wonder what the health effects of the treatment have been.
I had to have my gallbladder removed about four years after the treatment. Perhaps the two were related.

47. I really hope that everyone with Hepatitis C now gets the treatment and the help that they need.

48. Resources like the Hepatitis C Trust are so welcome and I hope that people are using these resources.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 29/1/2020