

Witness Name: Emma McDonald

Statement No.: WITN4069001

Exhibits: **WITN4069002 - 006**

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF EMMA MCDONALD

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

I, Emma McDonald, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Emma McDonald. My date of birth is GRO-C 1980 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a housewife and married with three children.
2. I intend to speak about my now deceased Grandad, Ronald George Webb's Hepatitis C infection. In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment received and the impact it had on him and our family lives.
3. My Grandmother, Rosemary Webb is also providing a statement to the inquiry and my statement should be read in conjunction with hers, See **WITN4152001**.

4. I can confirm that I am not legally represented and I am happy for my statement to be in the public domain. I am aware that if I criticise any medical professional then they will have a right of reply.

Section 2. How Affected

5. My Granddad GRO-C have Von Willebrand disease (VWD), so I grew up knowing about bleeding disorders.
6. I started becoming aware of a serious problem with my Grandad around 2007. He was having a lot of visits to the hospital and we were told that he was bleeding from the oesophagus. I also knew that his condition was getting worse because I noticed that he was gradually getting more unsteady on his feet. There were other signs; he was noticeably slower to do things, he began to look frail and on occasions he would be forgetful.
7. On one occasion my grandad tried to help bring in my daughter's pram but he could not manage it because he was so unsteady and weakened. Another time, when my daughter was a little bit older she was taking a long time in the toilet and my Grandad ended up having an accident. This was just not like him at all. It hurt me inside to see him deteriorate in front of my eyes. He had always been a rock in the family.
8. In 2011, on the day my Grandad found out he had contracted Hepatitis C (HCV), he came home furious. He told me and my mum that he had been told he had HCV. He said that it had just been mentioned casually because the doctors presumed that he knew already. He was left to get on with it. There was no information, not even a leaflet on how he should manage the condition or what it meant for him and my gran going forward. Surely whoever told him would know from his medical records that he was not aware? I would imagine the condition is well documented for those who have it. It was a bombshell to drop on an elderly man.

9. I was angry that this had not been managed properly so we went to our MP, Brandon Lewis. He helped us to write to the hospital in November 2011 complaining about the way my grandad had been informed of the diagnosis. The hospital replied in February 2012 and there was a lot of back and forth communication but it took a long time for us to conclude this with the hospital. Having our MP corresponding was not as helpful as we expected so we decided to leave him out of further correspondence in 2012. **Exhibit WITN4069002** is a response from the hospital to our MP in February 2012.
10. I continued to write letters to the hospital, challenging the hospital procedures that had allowed these events to take place. (**See Exhibit WITN4069003**). The aim was to find out what went wrong and why my grandad was never informed that he was being tested for HCV in 2007 and why, after that test it was never ensured that he was aware of the outcome.
11. I explained that the hospital's lack of communication had placed those close to my Grandad at risk including myself and my grandmother and his grandchildren. I also asked why my Grandad was never offered counselling because the hospital's published guidelines stated that patients should be offered counselling services upon receiving their diagnosis of HCV.
12. Finally, in June 2012, the hospital apologised for the way my Grandad had been informed. They explained that after he was tested in March 2007, he had not handed in a follow-up slip at their reception (**See Exhibit WITN4069004**.) Apparently, if he had, he would have been informed 6 months later at a follow up appointment. I found this hard to take and offensive to my family A piece of paper! Why was there no failsafe system in place to check that appointments were kept in relation to such a serious condition? I decided to challenge their procedures for

dealing with HCV patients. I sent a further letter in December 2012. **(See Exhibit WITN4069005)**

13. After hearing this, I couldn't bring myself to tell my Grandad because it would have upset him even more. My later letter elicited a further reply in March 2013 with yet another apology and the steps they had taken to rectify mistakes. This included that they now have a computer system in place which would ensure that they don't miss any patients in the future. The letter also stated that they were reviewing their processes and plan to have a Hepatitis C nurse in place with every patient. **(See Exhibit WITN4069006)** It felt barbaric that they weren't already doing this in 2013.

14. To date, I have been unable to resolve why they never called my Grandad in for testing before 2007. He had Von Willebrand disease and surely his doctors must have been aware or suspected that he may have use contaminated blood products, such as Factor VIII at some stage.

15. Even though the hospital denied that this was the case, it felt like they were treating him as if he was terminally ill when he had the oesophageal bleeding. They never dug into the root cause of the problem instead they kept patching him up and sending him away. I often wonder how much longer he would have had if the disease had been found and treated earlier.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. As far as I am aware, my Grandad did not receive any other infections apart from HCV. I can't comment on how it may have impacted on other conditions he had as I don't know how long he was infected for prior to diagnosis. I am aware it must have been a long time as he developed liver cirrhosis.

17. I believe that he was tested for HIV and returned a negative result.

Section 4. Consent

18. As stated above, my Grandad was never informed that he was being tested for Hepatitis C. I do not know if he was asked to consent to receiving Factor VIII or blood transfusions on all the occasions he received blood or blood products. I genuinely believe that my Grandad was tested in secret and the results were swept under the carpet.

Section 5. Impact

19. It has been devastating to watch what this has done to my family, especially because my Grandad's HCV and care has caused a rift between my mother and Grandmother which to date, has still not been repaired and that has been very difficult for me.

20. It was difficult to see my Grandad get weaker as I was growing up to the point where he was unsteady on his feet and needed help to get around.

21. After learning about my Grandad's HCV diagnosis, I was determined to bring the hospital to book. I knew it was wrong how he had been treated and I demanded answers from them both for myself and for the wider family. We had a right to know exactly what went on. It did consume me for a time because the doctors and hospitals have not been very helpful or forthcoming.

22. It is also very difficult to bear because I feel like I have been cheated of my right to be angry about the poor treatment my Grandad received because of his age. He was 84 and could have died anyway but he died horribly due to HCV. He was very ill and in pain for much of the last few years of his life

23. My Grandad used to talk to me about how he felt and the indignity of it all affected him the most. He could not understand how it had happened and couldn't face up to his diagnosis. He buried his head in the sand and he did not want me to complain to the hospital at first because he didn't want me to get upset.

24. When he found out that he had liver cirrhosis he was devastated. He said that he felt like people would judge him. He was from an era whereby cirrhosis was always associated with alcohol misuse. He did not have to give up alcohol because he didn't use to drink anyway but he was only too aware of the stigma around the disease. Strangely enough and it's again probably an age thing, he was not really aware of the stigma surrounding HCV.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

25. My Grandad was never offered treatment because they said he was too old and that his genotype of the Hepatitis C itself was difficult to clear.

26. Even after my Grandad found out his diagnosis, my Grandmother was never offered a test to see if she had HCV, and no other immediate family member was offered a test either.

27. Neither my Grandad nor any other family member was ever offered counselling even after we complained that my he should have received counselling at the point of diagnosis.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

28. I found out about the Skipton Fund while researching my Grandad's condition in 2011/2012. As far as I am aware the option was never provided by any of the medical staff dealing with my Grandad.

29. We applied for support from the Skipton Fund in 2011/2012, while my Grandad was still alive. The Skipton Fund said he did not have the right blood test so he had to have another blood test to confirm that he had HCV. There were no further problems.
30. My grandparents received a Stage 1 payment of £20,000. We later applied for a Stage 2 payment and they received £50,000. Additionally, there was an annual income of £12,000 divided monthly, but this stopped when my Grandad passed away. They did not sign any conditions or waivers in relation to the lump sum payments. I feel that the payments should transfer smoothly to the spouse on the death of their partner. Why are they left without income at such a difficult time? We did obtain support later but it took time again.
31. My Grandmother also received a £10,000 widow's payment in 2016.
32. I found out that we could apply to the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS), so we applied to the fund again and were approved in July 2018.
33. My Grandmother's pension credits have been stopped twice because of these payments. I have had to write letters to prove where my Grandmother's income is coming from. They said that it is our responsibility to prove the case and each time it has taken a few months to rectify the issue. It has been distressing and mentally disturbing for me and my Grandmother. It is lucky that I am here to assist her as she would find it very harrowing to deal with at her age. It is not a simple process. What about those who have no help?
34. The way the systems are set up is confusing and arbitrary. We could have received funeral costs but on inquiring with EIBSS, they replied it would be under the old scheme and it was too late to have it covered. However, I later found out from a Facebook group that another lady had

been granted cover for funeral costs backdated to 2010. The help that is available should be available to one and all.

Section 8. Other Issues

35. I have since got married, so some of the letters exhibited may be addressed to my maiden name, Emma Allan.
36. I no longer have faith in medical professionals that they have our best interests at heart, so I ask a lot more questions now and have everything explained. I don't have faith that this sort of thing cannot happen again. It has made me suspicious of the medical profession. I believe they sometimes like to take the easy route.
37. I think the financial aspects and the funds should be consolidated more because the current process is confusing for people to navigate. We have had to do everything ourselves and find out information from online support groups and Facebook.
38. The full list of the exhibits accompanying my statement are listed below

Exhibit number	Description
WITN4069002	Letter dated 17 February 2012 from James Paget Hospital to Mr Brandon Lewis MP responding to the complaint
WITN4069003	Letter dated 30 April 2012 from witness highlighting concerns regarding the hospital's response to the complaint
WITN4069004	Letter dated 11 June 2012 from James Paget's hospital explaining the hospital's practice and why witness' grandfather was never

	informed of his diagnosis
WITN4069005	Letter dated 24 December 2012 from the witness seeking clarification on the hospital's usual practice in relation to testing, diagnosis and informing patients
WITN4069006	Letter dated 27 March 2013, from James Paget Hospital apologising and explaining how they plan to change practice for future HCV patients

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 24.6.21