

Witness Name: Peter John Gibbs

Statement No: WITN2906001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 29th April 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF PETER JOHN GIBBS

I, Peter John Gibbs will say as follows:-

Section 1 – Introduction

1. My name is Peter John Gibbs. My date of birth is GRO-C 1945 and I live at GRO-C Thailand with my Thai wife and her family. I am a retired language teacher. I have two daughters, twins, Meg and Elizabeth who live in the UK as well as four grandchildren who live in Devon.
2. This statement has been made in relation to my son, Robert Peter Gibbs, (Robert) who was born on GRO-C 1970. He passed away on 28th July 1991 at the age of 21 as a result of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which he contracted through being treated with infected blood products.
3. This Witness Statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to Robert's full medical records.

Section 2 - How Affected

4. Robert was born with moderate-severe Haemophilia A. He was approximately one year old when he was diagnosed with the condition. He had an accident and cut his gum, he was taken to hospital and was diagnosed with haemophilia.
5. Robert was initially treated with Cryoprecipitate from the time he was first diagnosed until about 1975/1976. After that date he was treated with Factor VIII at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. He was treated by Dr Richard Lee.
6. Robert was treated with blood products for his Haemophilia from the time he was diagnosed until he died. My former wife, Robert's mother, Helen Joyce Hirsch was in charge of Robert's treatment.
7. Neither Robert's mother or I were ever informed about any risks to Robert as a result of being treated with blood products.
8. As a result of being treated with contaminated blood products Robert was infected with HIV.
9. In 1985 Dr Lee suspected that Robert had been infected with HIV and arranged for Robert to have a blood test. The result of the blood test confirmed that Robert had been infected with HIV.
10. Robert was told of the diagnosis at the hospital where he went for treatment every four to six weeks, he was told of the diagnosis at one of those appointments. I was not at the appointment, as I was working. Robert's mother was with him. Robert was about 15 years old at the time.

11. At the time Robert was informed of the diagnosis I believe information was given to him about it; he had a good relationship with Dr Lee. I knew what HIV was at that time; in particular that it was bad news.
12. I believe that Robert was given adequate information to enable him to understand and manage the infection.
13. I also believe that the manner in which the results of the tests and the information about the infection were communicated to Robert and his mother were satisfactory.
14. I am pretty certain that, at the time of the diagnosis, Robert was given information about the risks of others being infected as a result of his HIV diagnosis. I think we also did our own research.

Section 3 – Other Infections

15. After Robert died, my daughter, Meg, discovered that it is likely Robert was also infected with Hepatitis C (HCV) as a result of being treated with contaminated blood. Robert's medical records have been destroyed so there is no supporting documentary evidence.
16. However, Meg contacted the Tainted Blood campaign/support group and was told that Robert's estate might be eligible for payment/s from the Skipton Fund. Meg found the information online and applied for the Stage One payment.
17. Dr Coppel, a Haematology Consultant at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (Wonford) completed the Skipton Stage 1 application form, and sent the form directly to the Skipton Fund; Meg was not given the opportunity to read it.

18. The Stage One payment was received from the Skipton Fund which is an indication that Robert must also have contracted HCV, or that there was a high probability that he had contracted it from contaminated blood products.
19. Otherwise, I am not aware of any other infections that Robert had as a result of being given contaminated blood.

Section 4 – Consent

20. I do not believe that Robert was treated or tested without his knowledge, or without his consent or without being given adequate or full information. However, no information was available, certainly we were not given any, about the blood products that Robert was treated with and I naturally assumed that the products had been adequately screened and were safe. I do not think that Robert was treated or tested for the purposes of research.

Section 5 – Impact

21. Basically, how does a 15 year old feel when he has been given a death sentence? Robert took it on the chin. He got on with life and school where he was bright and a well-rounded student.
22. At the age of 17 Robert was diagnosed with cancer of the lymph system after discovering a small lump on his neck. He was only given a 17% chance of pulling through. He was treated with chemotherapy and he lost his hair but he did bravely pull through.
23. However, Dr Lee said that the lymphoma showed that Robert had developed AIDS. As a result he died on 28th July 1991 at the age of 21.

24. The treatment that Robert received for HIV was Retrovir which is an antiretroviral medication.
25. In the early stages of Robert's diagnosis he appeared to cope, then, in the later stages, when he was about 18 years old, he started to smoke cannabis with two or three of his friends, it was his escape from reality. The police became involved a couple of times, but Robert's friends were a great support to him and came to Robert's funeral. When he was admitted to hospital he asked the doctor to prescribe him a substitute for cannabis which the doctor did.
26. When Robert was receiving treatment health staff were always fully aware of his HIV status.
27. Robert died about two weeks after he was released from hospital in the home that I had purchased for my three children which had been decorated with Bob Marley posters. He was a big fan of Bob Marley and had been able to visit Bob Marley's home in Jamaica with his mother.
28. Robert's attitude just before he passed away was extraordinary; he told me, "Dad, I've had a good 21 years, a great life with family and friends, what is the difference between living 21 years or 80 years, an 80 year old might grow to be crippled and in pain, I won't have any of that!". He was very philosophical about it, his faith was an unusual mixture of Christianity and Rastafarian, and in his way he rather adopted a Rasta lifestyle.
29. The truth of what was happening to Robert was unbearable so, as a family, we did not talk about it. Perhaps we should have done. It was shattering for us. Robert had HIV and then AIDS.
30. My personal relationship with Robert's mother was not good before he was infected and deteriorated after 1985. I would say that this was due to GRO-C

GRO-C

My two daughters, Meg and Elizabeth were very strong and although devastated they were a great comfort to Robert and his mother. Robert's mother and I divorced in 1991 before he died.

31. In 1993 I moved to Thailand to teach English. I had taken a holiday there in both 1991 and 1992; it offered a complete change in lifestyle to me and I love to teach, I planned only one year, but I've been teaching here ever since.
32. Robert and his mother went to a clinic in Florida where Robert could get treatment for his immune system. Whilst she was in the US she met an American guy who she eventually married, but has since divorced.
33. Robert's grandparents and aunts and uncles were also shattered by the diagnosis and Robert's illness.
34. We kept Robert's illness a secret due to the stigma it carried at the time. This was so difficult for all of us.
35. Robert was unable to finish secondary school because of his lymphoma diagnosis. He was pretty poorly during his fifth and sixth form years. He abandoned his dream of a place at university because of his weakened state.
36. He did though hold down a job at Barclays Bank for a while but had to give it up due to the amount of sick leave he had to take.
37. He then worked part-time as a technical drawer but also had to give that up due to his failing health. He did not work from then on; he was only 19 years old.
38. I was self-employed at the time but could be available as necessary but Robert's mother attended most of his appointments with him.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support.

39. I do not believe that Robert faced any difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment, care and support as a consequence of being infected with HIV.
40. No counselling or psychological support was ever made available to anyone although Dr Lee was very supportive of Robert. I stayed pretty controlled during Robert's illness but I feel counselling or psychological support could have helped Robert's mother.

Section 7. Financial Assistance.

41. In 1989/1990 Robert received £20,000 from the MacFarlane Trust.
42. In 1991 he received the ex gratia payment from the Government of £40,000 but he had to sign the waiver form. The money was used for Robert to attend the clinic in Florida to receive treatment and to enjoy the rest of his life. He enjoyed it, he had a wonderful time spending the money he received.

43 In January 2017 I received, as Executor of Robert's Estate, £20,000 from the Skipton Fund. As stated above, my daughter, Meg filled in the application form and dealt with the process.

Section 8: Anonymity, Disclosure and Redaction

44 ☐ I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

45 ☐ I do not wish to be called to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signed:

GRO-C

Peter John Gibbs

Dated: 29th April 2019