

Witness Name: Charlene Smith

Statement No: WITN1528001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHARLENE SMITH

I, Charlene Smith, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Charlene Smith, DOB GRO-C1988 and I live at GRO-C
GRO-C
2. My father, Stephen Townsend, DOB GRO-C1955, died on 15.05.2016 at the age of 60 after being infected with Hepatitis C through contaminated blood products.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late father's medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

Section 2. How Affected

4. My father suffered from mild Haemophilia B with a clotting factor of around 14%.
5. He received his treatment from the Oxford Hospital throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He transferred his care to Gloucester in the mid 1990s and was treated at Bristol Hospital from the late 2007 onwards.

6. When I was growing up Dad didn't even act like he had haemophilia. He had little to no treatment. He lived a normal life and rode motorcycles. He was diagnosed with his haemophilia when he was admitted for tonsillitis and almost bled to death.
7. In or around 1981 he was given blood transfusions and Factor IX when he had gum disease and had all of his teeth removed. This operation was carried out at Oxford and it is where he was infected with Hepatitis C.
8. I believe that my father found out about his infection when he went for routine blood tests at his GP in 1999. He was told that he had Hepatitis C but I don't believe he was really told much about it at this stage.
9. When I was a teenager he explained his Hepatitis C infection to me. He said that his virus would turn to either Hepatitis A or Hepatitis B, one of which could be cured and one of which couldn't, giving him a 50/50 chance of survival. Now that I have a better understanding of the infection, it is clear to me that nothing was really explained to him as he was very misinformed.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I am not aware of what other infections my father may have been exposed to.

Section 4. Consent.

11. I believe that my Dad was only aware that he was being tested for Hepatitis C in 1999. If he was tested before this time he had no knowledge of those tests.

Section 5. Impact

12. It wasn't until I was around 14 that I really saw a decline in Dad. He tried to keep a lot from me. I lived with my Mum but I stayed with my Dad every weekend. It was around the time of Dad's deterioration that I started smoking and drinking. I then left school during sixth form to get a job.
13. When I was growing up Dad was a self employed painter and decorator. He then had an issue with his back which meant he couldn't do it anymore. After this it was like he just gave up, and from then he gradually deteriorated both mentally and physically.

14. Dad was very jaundiced. There were days he would be yellow and tired. He suffered from depression and anxiety for as long as I can remember. He was on anti-depressants for over 10 years. He had terrible moods. He was also diabetic which was undiagnosed for two years which also caused problems and pain in his legs.
15. Dad stopped going out, he stopped playing pool with his friends which he used to do every week and he slowly regressed into himself. I don't know if it was his way of protecting people around him. He found solace in the internet and would play games online until the early hours of the morning. On one occasion Dad sat me down and told me that it was all getting too much for him. He explained what medications he would take to end it all.
16. He really struggled with his mental health and he had no trust in doctors. He changed his GP three times in the last few years of his life and he refused treatment for most bleeds. I only remember Dad receiving treatment once; even when he fell off his bike he would refuse treatment. He refused oncology treatment because he didn't want to be treated like a guinea pig, and he had a deep distrust of the NHS in general.
17. As far as I am aware, Dad didn't know he had cancer; all of his problems were put down to diabetes. I never remember him going to the hospital in relation to his liver or any liver monitoring. He had pain from his liver for which his doctor gave him painkillers but I do not believe treatment was ever discussed with him.
18. For the last year of his life he was very withdrawn. I didn't see him for the last year at his request although I spoke to him on three occasions within that time over the phone (the last being in March 2016). It was really difficult for me knowing he didn't want to see me. After he died his neighbour told me 'your Dad wasn't your Dad towards the end'. I had my second child in 2015 and he never got the chance to meet his Grandad. I feel angry that I never got to say goodbye to my Dad and that my son never got to meet him.
19. I found out about Dad's death when I received a voicemail from the Coroner. I couldn't get through to the Coroner so I went to Dad's house. There was no answer so I asked the neighbour who told me that Dad had been taken away in an ambulance. After speaking to the Coroner, I had to go and identify Dad's body. I then had to make arrangements for the funeral and his bungalow. His autopsy showed that he died as a result of liver cancer.

20. I fell into depression and was put on anti-depressants after my father's death. I didn't really start grieving for my Dad until the following year after I had dealt with all of his financial issues [GRO-C].

21. Dad should still be here; he suffered from cirrhosis of the liver which turned cancerous. Dad died as a result of his Hepatitis and not his haemophilia.

22. I have been married since 2012. [GRO-C]

[GRO-C]

was bleeding internally shortly after the death of my father. They said they needed to give [GRO-C] an emergency blood transfusion which really worried me considering what happened to my Dad and I had to pull the nurse out of the room for assurances that the blood was not infected; I shouldn't have to think about that when [GRO-C] needed life-saving treatment.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

23. Dad was never offered any counselling in relation to his illness or diagnosis, but I believe his GP made counselling available to him due to his depression.

24. I started becoming more positive in 2018 after speaking to more people about what happened to my Dad. I have been speaking to a lot of people through the campaign groups and other people who have lost parents to contaminated blood; we are almost like a family.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

25. My dad received the Stage One payment from the Skipton Fund.

26. After his death, I applied for the Stage Two payment which was split between me and my two siblings.

Section 8. Other Issues

27. This doesn't just affect one generation. My eldest son was not able to have a real relationship with his Grandad and my younger son was never even given the chance to meet him.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

28. I do not want to apply for anonymity.

29. I don't wish give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.....

Dated.....

i. I do not want to apply for anonymity.

.I don't wish give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

I.

GRO-C

29th MARCH 2019