

Witness Name: Christopher Wood

Statement No.: WITN3601001

Exhibits: None

Dated: 12.09.19

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER WOOD

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 4th August 2019.

I, Christopher Wood, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Christopher Wood. My date of birth is GRO-C 1971 and my address is known to the Inquiry. My father, John, died on the GRO-C GRO-C 1993. I intend to speak about how my father came to be infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). 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.

Section 2. How Affected

1. Dad suffered for many years with heart problems and this resulted in him having a heart bypass operation at the London Chest Hospital in

December of 1982. I understand that during this operation Dad was given a blood transfusion and his operation was considered successful.

2. I was 11 years old at the time and so maybe less aware of the seriousness of things. I remember going to visit Dad in hospital but I wasn't unduly worried. Due to my young age, I didn't understand the implications of having heart bypass surgery and I fed off other family members, my two older sisters and particularly my Mum.
3. The doctors had said it was a routine operation and so I didn't feel like there was anything to worry about. Dad kept any fears or reservations, if he had them to himself. I wasn't concerned because no one else appeared concerned.
4. Dad worked as a manager for British Telecom, based in the City of London, and so he used to commute daily, in and out of London. I don't remember too much from this period of time. I do remember Dad was tired and references being made to the fact but I took this as fairly normal for someone working in London and commuting. I have since experienced it myself and would often fall asleep on the train.
5. During the period of time between Dad's heart bypass operation and his death, a significant memory for me was when we had to cancel our family holiday to Cyprus. I was 14 or 15 at the time and Dad had developed an infection in his leg. The site of infection was where a vein had been removed and put into his heart during his heart by pass. I remember being annoyed that we had to cancel the trip because it meant that I had to go back to school instead (it was during the school term).
6. 10 years after his operation, Dad took advantage of a voluntary redundancy with a pay-out that meant he no longer had to commute. This was obviously better for his health because, as I understand it now, Dad's health had deteriorated a lot by then. At the time I hadn't realised how bad he had become.

7. My parents took a holiday to America towards the end of the year, after he had retired. It was after this holiday that I began to notice a deterioration in Dad's health. I remember him sitting in his chair at home, complaining of headaches and feeling really sick. Some of this knowledge would have been relayed through my Mum, as Dad wouldn't tell us directly. Up until this point, I felt like I was shielded from what Dad had been going through. I trusted the National Health Service (NHS) and so I wasn't concerned. At that point I had thought it could have been some kind of a general virus. Whatever that may mean, it did not seem to me, to be a serious thing.
8. During the Christmas period of 1992 Dad suffered a fit. It was late at night; my sisters and I were downstairs and Mum and Dad were in bed. Dad was trying to go to the toilet but he was having trouble getting out of bed. Mum called me to help so I went up and assisted him across the landing but he ended up wetting himself before he could reach the toilet. At that point we called the doctor and I knew that there was something seriously wrong with him. The doctor came to our place and appeared very calm and wasn't panicking, so that made us a little more relaxed about what was happening. Roughly an hour after the doctor had left, I heard mum screaming and I rushed back upstairs to see Dad having what I could only describe as a fit. He was shaking in bed. We knew then that we had to call for an ambulance.
9. I went in the ambulance with Dad to Broomfield Hospital while Mum and my sisters followed in the car. This event stuck in my memory. I never imagined ever having to do that for my Dad. That was the first time I'd experienced any type of helplessness from him. I would have been 21 years old.
10. At the time, I was trying to understand what was wrong with Dad and all I could think was that he had suffered a stroke. The doctors were also suspecting something along those lines but even after they had run a lot of tests they couldn't determine what was wrong with him. They took a

biopsy of his liver, which I now understand would have been quite painful, and they began asking questions about what Dad had done on holiday in America. They were thinking Dad had possibly contracted a rare tropical disease. Eventually, a specialist who was visiting the hospital and was presumably consulted, suggested Dad should have an HIV test. We only found out about this intervention, subsequent to learning that Dad had HIV.

11. When the HIV test results came through, my family and I were in a private room off the ward at Broomfield Hospital. Mum was taken out to talk to the doctor in private where she was told the news about Dad after which, they returned to tell us the news. I can't remember exactly how the news was broken to us that Dad was HIV positive.
12. I was 21 years old at the time and I knew HIV was a death sentence and it was terminal. Mum didn't seem to understand the gravity of the situation. At that stage she seemed to be taking the news too lightly. I think she might have been in a form of denial but also, I don't believe she understood how serious having HIV was, and that Dad was close to the end of his life.
13. After finding out about Dad's HIV diagnosis I remember we were all in floods of tears. Dad was conscious and he recognised us, calling us by our names but we couldn't say anything to him about his diagnosis as he was too unwell. Dad never knew he had HIV.
14. I knew there was massive stigma surrounding HIV through adverts on TV and that it was primarily something that was transmitted through sexual intercourse and intravenous drug use. Dad wasn't a haemophiliac, he wasn't a homosexual and as far as I was aware he didn't fit into the high-risk category for contracting HIV. It does go through your mind though, wondering how he contracted HIV. It was extremely unlikely that he did drugs so the next thing you think was whether he got it through sexual contact. I didn't realise that dad had had a blood transfusion as part of the heart bypass operation. I didn't realise that this

was part of the procedure at the time. Also, I associated contracting HIV with rapidly declining health and death and I had no idea that someone could live for 10 years with so few symptoms. I therefore did not suspect that my dad's HIV diagnosis related to his heart bypass operation 10 years previously. I remember that I did have an open mind regarding Dad's HIV, however I couldn't come to any conclusion on it. The whole situation was confusing and extremely traumatic.

15. The day Dad died, we were called to go to the hospital. When we got there, Dad was unconscious. At one point, we were asked to leave his room as the nurses were wanting to turn him to prevent bed sores. Very quickly after we'd left, they told us we should come back in as they knew he was dying. Mum was 'beside herself' and I think it had finally caught up with her what was happening. She was saying things like 'you shouldn't have turned him' and on reflection, I believe this shows that she didn't really understand the situation we were in. Dad died right before our eyes. The nurses left us alone in the room for some time and I remember thinking that this was a life changing moment. Things would never be the same again. It was very final.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. To my knowledge, my dad received HIV as a result of receiving infected blood during a blood transfusion.

Section 4. Consent

17. I have no knowledge of my dad being treated without his consent or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

18. Before he died, Dad would do everything for the family, including taking care of the bills and any repairs around the house that were needed.

Mum was more concerned with house work and the domestic side of things and that's how she wanted it. She wanted Dad to run the finances and the bills. Even to this day Mum's not on top of finances and she leaves it to my sisters and me to deal with. After Dad's death we knew there was suddenly going to be a big hole in the family and we had to 'step up' and help. Fortunately, we were financially ok. Mum received half of Dad's pension, which was enough for her lifestyle as she lives quite frugally. It was a massive change for all of us.

19. After Dad's death, I did worry a bit more about certain things. I went through a phase of paranoia, worrying if I had chest pains and looking out for possible HIV symptoms if I ever had unprotected sex. You appreciate your own mortality after seeing a close relative die, particularly someone who was considered to be head of the household.
20. While I was relatively young when Dad died, I don't see myself as a victim. I know there are many people who have lost their father's when they were much younger than me. I don't feel like I'm in a worse position than other people. Having said that, when your Dad dies in your early 20's, I was 21 years old at the time, you do miss out on the advice you would have received and should continue to receive throughout your life.
21. Dad was a very sensible man and he was logical. I can go to my sisters for advice but it's not really the same. My male influence had gone. I think having your father around for advice and to have shared life experiences and memories, are very important. That all went the day he died. That has been the biggest impact on me. Dad's dying, definitely left a big hole.
22. I didn't believe that I needed any psychological support. At the time I was in shock, then later on I went through a period of grieving with tears and sadness. As a family we have discussed it a few times but for me I don't think that what Dad went through has necessarily had a long-lasting psychological impact on me.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

23. No psychological support was offered to me or my family. I can only recall that a health visitor came around to our house to provide us with advice about HIV, but that was it.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

24. I am aware that my mum applied for and received payment from a fund concerning victims and their families who contracted HIV via contaminated blood.

Section 8. Other Issues

25. With regard to the fund payment in para 24. I know my Mum signed a waiver or a declaration when she was given the compensation. We were advised by a specialist doctor that we should sign it on the basis that the NHS did not know at the time that there was a problem with contaminated blood and blood products. We had no idea that they actually did know that blood was contaminated. I understand now that more might have been known than we were told at the time.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 12.09.19