

Witness Name: Sydney Wassmer

Statement No.: WITN4024001

Exhibits: WITN

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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SYDNEY WASSMER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 30 January 2020.

I, Sydney Wassmer, will say as follows: -

Section 1 - Introduction

1. My name is Sydney Wassmer. My date of birth is GRO-C 1949. My address is known to the Inquiry. I was born and raised in London and moved to Scotland when my wife, now deceased, became ill. I currently reside in Scotland. Whilst in London I worked for BP Oil as a building service manager, however, I am now retired. I currently live with my partner Carol, who I have been with for around three years.
2. I met my wife, Annie Wassmer in Scotland around 40 years ago and we were married in 1973. I have no children, even though Anne and I would have liked a big family.
3. Today I intend to speak about my wife, Anne's Hepatitis C infection. In particular, the nature of her illness and how the illness impacted myself and my wife.

Section 2 – How Infected

4. In August 1983 Anne had been feeling unwell for around two to three months. She was seeing a doctor in London who told her it was her hormones and not to worry.
5. We travelled to Scotland one weekend for a family gathering. When we arrived on Friday she was feeling unwell. The next day she was still feeling ill and so Anne's mum called her regular doctor, Dr McKay Hart, to the home. The doctor believed Anne may have had an ectopic pregnancy. He said he needed to go to his surgery to look up the symptoms and he would be back. He came back to the house and confirmed it likely was an ectopic pregnancy and he called an ambulance.
6. Anne was taken to Stobhill General Hospital in Glasgow where it was confirmed she had an ectopic pregnancy and underwent emergency surgery. I am not sure who performed the surgery at the hospital. During the surgery she was given six pints of blood and was kept in intensive care for about 4 to 5 days.
7. When Anne was released from hospital I was busy at work so I was unable to look after her. She decided to stay with her mum for a while and came back to London once she was feeling better.
8. Anne did make a physical recovery after the ectopic pregnancy and she returned to work once she was back in London. She worked as a distribution manager for a video company. Anne, however, never really recovered mentally. We got on with life. Even though she knew we couldn't now have kids she was upset about this.
9. Anne's health slowly deteriorated between 1983 and 2004, however in 2004 Anne became too ill to work. She was constantly tired and would break out in sweats. When Anne's health started to deteriorate she wanted to move to Scotland to be closer to her family so we both quit our jobs and moved to Scotland. I decided to look after Anne when she was ill. I was 55 at this stage.
10. When we moved to Scotland Anne joined a doctor's surgery in Kilmaurs and was under the care of Dr Alpine. Dr Alpine was taking blood approximately every six months for testing. I believe this was because he suspected something, however, he never made this clear to Anne and I. In around 2008 at an appointment with Anne, he told us that Anne had Hepatitis C. I remember his words being along the lines of 'I thought we had gotten away with it but it turns out Anne has Hepatitis C'. I took this to mean that Dr Alpine had

previously thought she had not been infected with Hepatitis C from the blood transfusion she received in 1983 after the ectopic pregnancy.

11. She was then sent to Crosshouse Hospital in Kilmarnock for more tests with a Dr Allen. It was here, on 23 September 2008 that Dr Allen confirmed Anne had Hepatitis C and that she contracted this infection via the transfusion she had in 1983. Dr Allen then sent Anne to Edinburgh Hospital to have further tests done. After these tests we were told that Anne had cancer in her liver and kidneys. We were initially told that there may be treatment options available to Anne, however, a week later we were told it was terminal and there was nothing they could do.
12. Anne went into hospital shortly before her death. I remember asking the doctor on the ward how long he thought she had so that I could make the necessary arrangements. He told me that she had about six to eight weeks left. I do not know the name of this doctor. I then saw a nurse who I trusted on the ward and I asked her how long she thought Anne had. She told me that Anne wouldn't make it past the weekend. Anne died the following Sunday on GRO-C 2009.

Section 3 – Other Infections

13. I am not aware of Anne being infected with any infection other than Hepatitis C as a result of being exposed to infected blood.

Section 4 – Consent

14. Anne did not consent to being given infected blood at the time she underwent emergency surgery at Stobhill General Hospital. However the procedure was by its very nature an emergency procedure and the opportunity to give consent probably didn't arise. Had she known at the time it would lead to Hepatitis C infection she may well not have given consent.

Section 5 - Impact

15. Anne was devastated when she found out she had Hepatitis C. Then after being told within such a short space of time that she had cancer, she went into her shell. She couldn't cope with having cancer, especially knowing that it was terminal.
16. Anne was the love of my life. I met Anne 40 years ago in Glasgow and from the moment I saw her, I knew she was the one.

17. When Anne got sick, my life was put on hold. At work there was talk of the company moving and whilst I loved my job and was prepared to move Ann's illness was at that stage unknown and it was equally unclear how long it would last. I accepted a redundancy package and took another job as a foreman in a hospital, a job I hated. It was then that we decided to move to Scotland. I gave up a well-paid job to move to Glasgow so that she could be closer to her family. We gave up our beautiful house in Sudbury and friends in London when we moved. All the people I knew in Scotland were Anne's family and they lived on the other side of Glasgow. We made friends with people around our home, but not close friends as we had in London.
18. Ultimately it was my choice to quit my job and look after Anne and I don't regret this decision at all. Looking back now I realise that when looking after Anne I did things for her that I didn't know I could do for anyone.
19. After Anne's death I went onto a bereavement programme located in Kilmaronock. I spoke to someone from this programme about 4 to 5 times. I decided after the last visit that I wouldn't continue any further with the programme as I had gained everything I could from it. I approach things pragmatically and I think this helped me with my grief.
20. I didn't go anywhere after Anne died. I didn't really know many people and so I kept to myself. It has only been in the last five years that I have been actively involved in the community again. I now go to Masonic meetings near my home and about three years ago I entered into a new relationship with Carol. I love Carol to bits, but Anne was my first love.
21. I do not believe my physical health suffered after the death of Anne, however, about six years ago I was diagnosed with Type II Diabetes.
22. Anne was one of five children. She had two sisters and two brothers. They all knew that Anne was ill but we didn't say too much about the illness to them. They would often visit Anne, but I was the one that looked after her.
23. Her siblings all lived about one and a half hours away and they all had young kids and their own lives. The illness took Anne so quickly in the end that she passed away before we really had a chance to involve Anne's family.

Section 6 - Treatment/Care/Support

24. Prior to Anne's diagnosis she was not on any medication. From Anne's diagnosis in September 2008 to her death in April 2009 I continued to look after

- her. Anne was really unwell and was unable to walk properly. She required around the clock care. We received a special bed and Zimmer frame that helped Anne to move around. We also had a nurse come to the house to help out. I cannot fault the nurses and doctors that cared for Anne once she was diagnosed. She received all the support and attention available.
25. Once Anne was diagnosed with Hepatitis C we were given no information about what it was. I conducted my own research on the computer about Hepatitis C, however, no explanation regarding transmission of the disease was given to us. From my research I knew straight away that it wasn't good.
26. Once we found out Anne had Hepatitis C I was tested, however, I am still awaiting the results of this test.
27. I presume they would have been able to identify the Hepatitis C infection prior to 2008.
28. We were never told that the cancer was a result of the Hepatitis C infection, however, I suspect that the two are linked.
29. Anne was not offered any counselling, nor did she seek counselling. I believe she would have taken up the opportunity for counselling if offered.

Section 7 - Financial Assistance

30. We were given multiple payments from the Skipton Fund once Anne was diagnosed with Hepatitis C.
- a. We were given £20,000 when Anne was diagnosed with Hepatitis C.
 - b. We were then given a further £25,000 when Anne was diagnosed with cancer.
 - c. I was then given a final £20,000 to £25,000 when Anne passed away.
31. I did not receive any further payments until I applied for a pension from the Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme in August 2019. I became aware of this scheme through advertisements in the newspaper. I completed the necessary forms and sent in a copy of Anne's death certificate and a medical note confirming Anne contracted Hepatitis C via infected blood. I was then informed that I was eligible for payments.

32. I was given an initial lump sum payment of £3,600 and £1,600 per month thereafter. I was then sent a further form to complete and on this form it was noted that I am now in a new relationship with Carol. Not long after I returned these forms I received a phone call from a representative from the Scheme advising me that my payments are going to stop because my new partnership makes me ineligible. I then received a letter advising me that I should not have been in receipt of the payments I had already received and that they would be making a final payment to me in January 2020. I was advised that there is a different claim I would be eligible for, however, this claim is means tested and on this basis I do not want to make this application.
33. I have now commenced an appeal against the decision to take my pension away based on the fact that that I have formed a new relationship. I do not feel it is just or equitable. I am living off my pension and have not been in receipt of any further payments since Anne passed away just under 11 years ago.

Section 8 - Other Issues

34. Looking back, it is clear to me that Anne's illness was in an advanced state before any diagnosis was given. I feel like this could have been avoided as it would have been known earlier that she was given a batch of infected blood.
35. I also don't think the government is doing enough to support people infected and affected by infected blood. I gave up a job that I loved and my life in London to care for my wife after she received an illness the government gave her.
36. Anne was only 59 when she passed away. We more than likely would still be enjoying a life in London if they hadn't given her the infected blood and this feels like an injustice.
37. I hope that by coming forward and telling my story it means this won't happen to anyone else.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____

GRO-C