

Witness Name: George Bridges

Statement No.: WITN4126001

Exhibits: WITN4126002

Dated: 22nd March 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GEORGE BRIDGES

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 18th January 2021.

I, George Bridges, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is George Bridges. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1950 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I intend to speak about my experience of being infected with hepatitis C and how I came to be infected. In particular, I will speak about how it has impacted me.
2. I don't wish to be anonymous for my statement.

Section 2. How Affected

3. On the 27th April 1980 I was involved in an incident where I was stabbed in the pub, with the knife being twisted in my stomach. I had to be admitted to Stirling Royal Infirmary. I exhibit a record that refers to this as **WITN5304002**. It was a

very serious incident. I remember being told that I had to keep my eyes open or I was going to die. I had an emergency operation as my gall bladder had ruptured which caused peritonitis. The doctors inserted an IV line and I was given a blood transfusion. I recall seeing the dark red bags of blood above my bed while I was recovering.

4. No one told me about the risks associated with receiving a blood transfusion at the time. I had no awareness of the risks until 2019.
5. My recovery after this incident was quite quick thankfully. I was released from on the 8 May 1980. I was unconscious for the first four or five days after the operation though so there are periods of time that I cannot recount now.
6. Despite my quick recovery, I started to realise over the following years that something was wrong with me. I began to always felt tired, stressed and run down. I was sweating without reason and I had itchy skin, particularly on my hands. When I raised it with my GP I was always told that I was making it up. I began to get fed up with doctors because no one would listen to me and work out what was wrong.
7. In 1985 I recall being told by a doctor that they had picked up that something was wrong with my liver and that I might have cirrhosis. I was told then that I had cirrhosis of the liver but reviewing my records now I cannot locate information about this, so I can only reason that the doctors reviewing me had noticed that something was wrong with my liver.
8. I am registered with Alva Medical Practice and I have been registered with them since I was two years old.
9. In 2019, I was caring for my two brothers Charles and James, who both died within a week of each other both from cancer. This was an extremely difficult time and I found I was feeling very unwell as I was trying to look after them. I felt very run down and I went to see my GP Dr Patel about it. I could feel that

there was something wrong with me. I had felt this for a long time but at this point I was very aware of how run down I was. Dr Patel said that he would do a full investigation and test me for everything. He did then he phoned me up on the 14th November 2019 saying that I had hepatitis C. I thought he was making it up at first the concept of this was just so unlikely to me. I was unbelievably angry.

10. My medical records show that I spoke things through with Dr Patel after I was diagnosed, when it was discussed with me that I could have received the infection through blood to blood contact and intercourse. I was advised that the infection could also be passed on through sharing razors. It was then I discussed with Dr Patel that I had received a blood transfusion which I thought at the time might have been 1979, but later on transpired it was 1980. I was referred onto a hepatitis C clinic by Dr Patel.

11. I have very little trust in doctors, particularly after this, however Dr Patel is one of the few doctors that provided me with proper information and spoke to me properly about the infection.

Section 3. Other Infections

12. I am not aware of being infected with anything else other than hepatitis C from the blood transfusion in 1980.

Section 4. Consent

13. Dr Patel gave me information about the infection but other than that I have always had to work out the information myself. After I left the surgery when I was diagnosed the first thing I did was look up what hepatitis C was online. The information I found left me feeling angry, disgusted and confused.

14. It is possible that I have been used for research purposes, but I could not comment for certain on this. I felt as though I was being used as a guinea pig

when I was having the hepatitis treatment afterwards which resulted in me attending Forth Valley Royal for assessment due to my mental health deteriorating.

Section 5. Impact

15. The information that I have had hepatitis C for over three decades has been the missing puzzle piece in my life. It explained so much and was the reason I was always so unwell. I would wake up with sweat pouring off me, I would get every infection going around and suffered significantly with agitation and anger without reason. My stress levels have always been very high as well.
16. I met with doctors at Stirling Royal Infirmary and they gave me information about treatment to cure the virus called epclusa. Again though I didn't receive all the information to understand it. I started the treatment but I began to experience significant fatigue, even worse than what I had done historically along with excessive sweating. At this point I felt as though the doctors could have been poisoning me.
17. My records note that I was being very clear with the doctors. The treatment left me feeling as though I was being used as a human guinea pig. I briefly stopped the treatment and found myself being assessed at Forth Valley Royal but ultimately I was able to complete the 12 week course of treatment and I was told I had cleared the virus.
18. I am now clear of the virus but very bitterly I have now been diagnosed with diabetes which I am told is linked to hepatitis C. Since I have finished the treatment I have had no scans, no follow ups and no after care. I was just discharged and that was it.
19. The doctors say that there is no sign of hepatitis in my blood now but I still feel like I have the illness and I have been left with all the damage. I don't believe that it is gone. The symptoms are still there, the sweats, the stress. My trust with NHS doctors is very low.

20. There is a stigma around the illness. People in my personal life who have worked out I have had the illness, stay away from me. I feel marked. I feel as though I could scrub myself clean but five minutes later I would still feel dirty.

21. When I was younger, I was as strong as an ox, I could do a full days work. Now, fatigue, and ill health leaves me falling asleep constantly and unable to do much at all. As my health has declined I have been unable to work and I found myself claiming benefits for the first time ten years ago.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

22. For years and years I was told that I was making all my symptoms up and to stop drinking. I was dismissed constantly when I did complain things weren't right, that was my support. Being disbelieved. "Hard men" don't get problems like this, except they do and being disbelieved has made what I went through much worse.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

23. I was not aware of the Skipton Fund and SIBSS until recently. Thompsons Solicitors informed me of the funds so I applied to SIBSS for support. SIBSS have awarded me with £50,000 and I have been advised that I am going to be receiving ongoing monthly payments.

24. The process for applying to the fund was quite straight forward..

Section 8. Other Issues

25. More than money, I want to see those who are responsible for this to be held accountable. My life has been destroyed because of ill health of a virus that the NHS gave me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C _____

Dated 5-5-2021 _____