

Witness Name: Peter Lawson

Statement No.: WITN5338001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 2021

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

---

### WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PETER LAWSON

---

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

I, Peter Lawson, will say as follows: -

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Peter Lawson. My date of birth is GRO-C 1963 and my address is GRO-C I work part time as both a delivery driver and a photographer and I have been married for 12 years. My wife, Kay, and I have been together for 17 years and have two adult children, aged 33 and 35.
2. I intend to speak about my late father, David Lawson, and his infection with hepatitis C (HCV). In particular, how he came to be infected, the nature of his illness, the support he subsequently received and the impact it has had on him and our family.

#### Section 2. How Infected

3. My father, David Lawson, was born in Edinburgh on GRO-C 1931. In September 1973 he went into the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (RIE)

for a Polygastrectomy operation. He liked to tell us the story of this hospital visit in later years; he had a huge scar running up his stomach and would tell us about how he was opened up during the operation.

4. He lost a lot of blood during the surgery and required multiple blood transfusions. I believe that he told me at some point he had received four units of blood in total, though I can't be certain of this.
5. My father was generally a healthy man – he smoked and he enjoyed a drink, but he did not have any persistent health conditions. I have a few vague memories of visiting him in the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh on several occasions as a child, but I cannot recall why he was there. He also had a few complaints in later life, such as having to wear glasses with a prism for many years due to poor eyesight, but nothing out of the ordinary. In general, he was in good health for most of his life.
6. He was trained as an electrician and had a number of different jobs over the course of his career. For a long while he was employed at a local carpet factory and managed three maintenance electricians there. When the factory closed, he worked on the railways for a time, maintaining the electrification on the east coast lines. He worked the night shift there, which I think he enjoyed as it wasn't as physically demanding as other shifts. Looking back now, it may well have been that the tiredness and fatigue caused by HCV contributed to this.
7. As he got older, there were changes in his behaviour that I now think may have been caused by his hepatitis infection. He used to read a lot in his 40s and early 50s. Then this completely stopped, as though he no longer had the concentration to get through a book. He would suddenly be falling asleep on the couch in the middle of the day.
8. I think that he was finally diagnosed with HCV sometime not long before 2007 – it was around this time that he told us anyway. My mother was beginning to suffer with Alzheimer's around this time as

well, so we found out about his illness before she did. He would have been trying to protect her by not telling her.

9. I think stigma played a big role in him being reluctant to talk to us about it. Hepatitis was associated with HIV and AIDS and all the stigma that came along with these illnesses were attached to hepatitis as well. I think he was embarrassed about it.
10. My father was very matter of fact about it when he did tell us; he didn't really elaborate on it – just said it as if it was something we needed to know but that he didn't want to talk about. We think he knew about it before then. There may even have been things he told my wife but not me. My dad really got on with Kay. She is a nurse so he could tell her all about his complaints – he liked having someone to talk about his health problems with. He would tell her about being tired and feeling generally unwell, but wouldn't tell the same things to me.
11. He was a smart man and always attributed his infection to the transfusions he received during surgery back in the 1970s. He liked to use the internet a lot and I imagine that he did a lot of research into the causes and consequences of the virus when he was first diagnosed. He would say he must have got it from that hospital stay, from those four units of blood he was given after his operation. He had tracked it back all those years. He had no other risk factors – no history of drug use or promiscuity, no tattoos or treatment abroad. As soon as he found out, he would have known how he came to be infected.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

12. As far as I am aware, there is no suggestion that he was exposed to any infection other than HCV as a result of him receiving blood transfusions.

### **Section 4. Consent**

13. I don't believe consent would have been issue with my father's medical treatment or him being tested. He was of a generation of people for whom it wasn't so important to be asked for specific consent and he certainly wouldn't have withheld it anyway.

#### **Section 5. Treatment/Care/Support**

14. As far as I know, my father never received any treatment for his hepatitis C infection. When he was going to the RIE or to his GP for an appointment of any sort, he wouldn't give me any details about it or tell us what it was specifically for. I certainly hope that he was at least offered treatment, but we don't know for sure whether or not he was.
15. Now that I am aware of how debilitating the treatment for HCV was at that point in time, I think it is perfectly possible that he declined the treatment once the consequences were explained to him. As previously noted, my mother was beginning to suffer from the onset of Alzheimer's disease at around the same time and my father was her primary carer. He wouldn't have done anything that would have risked him not being there to care for my mother.
16. This is just speculation, but it is the best possible explanation I can think of for why he did not receive treatment for hepatitis C. He was generally not one to turn down medical treatment when it was advised by a doctor, so I think there must have been a good reason for him to say no if he was, in fact, given the opportunity to be treated.
17. Similarly, with psychological support or counselling, he never mentioned any assistance of this kind being available to him, but we can't say for certain that it was not offered.
18. Despite this, he never described any difficulties in getting treatment or advice from his doctor, Dr Bathgate. He seemed very happy with the care provided to him by the hospital and spoke about Dr Bathgate in a positive light.

## **Section 6. Impact**

- 19.** My father died in December 2009. In the years before his death, his hepatitis infection had a huge impact on his health and his ability to enjoy life.
- 20.** Dad went through a big cognitive decline in the last few years of his life. He started to have a real loss of his focus – he lost the will to persevere and the interest required to keep his attention on things. He didn't lose the 'smarts', he still had the intellect to do it, but he just lost the ability to concentrate and focus his attention.
- 21.** He lost a huge amount of weight and looked generally very unwell. I remember him buying a new suit and it looking so small because of all the weight he had lost – it really was extreme. He would just say it was due to the HCV and nothing more. He looked very jaundiced for a year or so as well, and became incontinent.
- 22.** I don't think his infection had a huge impact on his career. The fatigue may have come close to having such an impact, but he managed to accommodate it. However, he did take some time off towards his retirement and I think there was a possibility that he took an early retirement as he was beginning to slow down.
- 23.** When I was a child, there would be a lot of parties in the house and we would always have visitors – friends, colleagues, relatives and so on. As life went on, it seemed that these relationships fizzled out and faded into the background. I think that it is a bit of a leap to say that this has anything to do with my father's hepatitis, but by the end he had virtually no friends and I think that this wouldn't have helped with his general decline.

24. At the time, we didn't know quite how much care my father was needing to give my mother; it was just another thing that he would keep to himself. He would say 'Oh, your mother is fine, don't worry', but she wasn't. She was getting progressively worse – I remember going around for dinner one afternoon and she served us raw pasta. She was a cook by trade, so it was very sad to see this decline in her. It is equally sad to think my father was dying from HCV but was not even able to speak to his wife about it.
25. The biggest general impact on his life was probably the tiredness. My parents bought a house in Spain about twenty years before my father died and we would have expected them to be there a lot of the time, but it seemed he just didn't have the energy. After his retirement, he would sometimes spend months at a time there, often with my mother, but on other occasions alone as well.
26. They went to their house in Spain for a fortnight in November 2009. He told me on the phone during this trip that he wasn't feeling good. I tried to convince him to get a flight home earlier than planned, but he was so frugal with his money he refused. My wife and I went to collect them from the airport – Kay remarked to me how he looked like a dead man walking the moment she saw him. He was so pale and thin. The first thing he said to me was, 'That's the last time I'm going to be there', referring to the house in Spain. I thought it was because of my mother's condition, but he must have known that he didn't have long left himself.
27. The doctor came out to see him at home when he returned and, for a few days after this, a nurse came to visit him every day. Eventually, though, he was admitted to hospital and he died shortly afterwards.
28. I was never happy about how my dad died and we went back to the hospital to talk to a doctor about it shortly afterwards. I believe it was a heart attack that was identified as the cause of death, but I think I can also remember cirrhosis of the liver being on the death certificate.

29. My father's illness and, of course, his death also had a monumental impact on me, as well as on my wife. In the years before his death, my dad and I would speak on the phone at least once a day and we grew very close. There were times in my life when I had my own problems and I didn't appreciate how big his problems were, such as when he took his early retirement. But in the five or so years before he died, we were in constant communication, chatting on the phone every day. I'd ring my parents' landline and my mum would just hand the phone straight over to my dad.
30. My wife and I would also visit at least once a week. My dad had a very sweet tooth and Kay would insist on taking a box of cakes for him every time. He really would love our visits.
31. We didn't realise how ill he was until he returned from that holiday in Spain. It was very hard to take – he was away on holiday one minute, and the next, he's gone. It was very traumatic to see him decline in the way that he did.
32. It was very difficult to lose my dad before I was 50 years old. We had developed a close bond over the years and had a great relationship – it was difficult to come to terms with that loss. It was a particularly hard time for me, as I lost my job a couple of months later. My employer told me that it was purely financial and decided they could do without me. But I think it is possible that they choose me to let go as I had been taking some time off as a result of my father's death.
33. There was suddenly a lot of pressure on us when dad died, as I would have to care for my mother now that he was gone. I have no siblings and all responsibility for the funeral arrangements fell on me as well.
34. My wife thinks that this was a factor in me being made redundant.

### Section 7. Financial Assistance

35. It was my father that initially applied to the Skipton Fund, so I do not know a great deal of detail about it all. I think he did tell us about it, though I'm sure that he wouldn't have done so until he was absolutely certain that he would be getting the money. I now understand that his initial application was rejected, so he probably didn't tell me about it until after this was successfully appealed.

36. A payment of £20,000 came shortly before his death and another payment was received just after he passed. The money went almost exclusively on my mother's care home fees. It slowly dwindled away and we needed to make up some of the money from other avenues as well, such as my dad's pension.

### Section 8. Other Issues

37. My father should have lived a lot longer than he did. All his relatives have lived to a healthy old age and he certainly should have outlived my mother. There's no amount of money in the world that can compensate for such a shortening of life.

### Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 17/07/2021