

Witness Name: Tamasin Pringle

Statement No.: WITN1961001

Dated: 21 January 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF TAMASIN PRINGLE

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Tamasin (Tammy) Pringle and my date of birth is GRO-C 1977.
My address is known to the Inquiry.

Section 2. How Affected

2. I am writing this statement in memory of my late mother, Zandra Pringle (DOB GRO-C 1947), who was infected with Hepatitis C from a blood transfusion in 1981.
3. My mum had several blood transfusions in 1981 at St Anne's Hospital in Blackpool. I was 5 years old at the time so I do not remember much about it, but I know that she collapsed suddenly one day, was taken to hospital and it was discovered that she had an ectopic pregnancy which had gone wrong. She was very ill at the time and lost a lot of blood so received quite a few transfusions.

4. My mum was aware that she had a transfusion but was not told about any risks involved. She would not have been able to consent beforehand because she was so unwell.
5. My mother was not diagnosed with Hepatitis C until June 2014.
6. I knew something was wrong, as she had not seemed well for a long time, since about 2012. However, no one knew how unwell she was. I had been trying to ring her that morning but she wasn't answering her phone, which was unlike her. When I went home to look for her, I found her lying in bed unconscious with her eyes just staring ahead. I phoned an ambulance and three paramedics arrived within 5 minutes. I was told by the paramedic in the ambulance that if she had been found 30 minutes later she would have been dead. They couldn't move her, her blood pressure was so low.
7. She was admitted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead and immediately had to have an 8 hour emergency surgery. She had such advanced varices that blood could not get through to her liver, and this had caused her veins to open, resulting in a massive internal bleed. Even after surgery, they said only 20% chance of making it through the night.
8. My mum remained at hospital in intensive care for 3 weeks. Whilst she was there, tests were conducted to figure out how she had become so unwell and it was determined that she had Hepatitis C.
9. Her surgeon informed her that she had tested positive for Hepatitis C, and that they needed to look further to see where it came from because my mum had no piercings or tattoos and had not used any drugs. The surgeon was then able to link it back to the blood transfusions she had during her ectopic pregnancy.
10. After her diagnosis, she was referred to see a hepatitis nurse, who told us about the Skipton Fund and how to apply for financial support. This nurse was very helpful and provided us with information, but only after we built a relationship with

her as my mum continued to return to the hospital and seek her advice. I felt there was a certain reluctance to give us information.

11. I couldn't believe that she had been living with Hepatitis C for all this time and nobody knew about it. It had caused cirrhosis of the liver because it had been untreated for so long.
12. I do not feel that adequate information was provided to her at the time of diagnosis. The only information that was shared, was done so only because I kept asking a lot of questions about it. I felt like I had to advocate for her.
13. I didn't know what Hepatitis C was at the time; I thought it was something to do with AIDS. It was all a big shock. When I found out about the contaminated blood scandal I looked into it further and tried to apply for copies of her medical records but was never able to obtain any. I wanted to find out how it had happened, why she was given the blood, etc. I thought it was a one-off error and didn't realise it was a massive scandal that happened to many people.
14. I think my mum should have been screened for hepatitis earlier than she was. She could have found out that she had been living with it a long time ago. They should have tested her for it whenever she had blood tests when she was poorly, if they knew she had had a transfusion. It's a bit of a shock when you are told that you are going for an emergency operation and later on you find out that through that operation you were infected with something that is basically a death sentence.
15. I do not feel my mum was given sufficient support at the time of her diagnosis. It seemed like the doctors didn't want to give any information about what would happen next or treatment options she had. They just told her the plain facts and that it could lead to liver cancer.
16. No information was provided to my mum about the risk of infecting others.

Section 3. Other Infections

17. My mother was infected with Hepatitis C only.

Section 4. Consent

18. I do not believe my mother was treated without her consent.

Section 5. Impact

19. My mother was never very well, but she didn't like a fuss and never went to the doctors. She may have had symptoms over the years that could be attributed to HCV, but there were never any clear signs that I was aware of, I just knew something was wrong. She was on lots of medication for blood pressure, and from about 2012 she was very lethargic and used to sleep all the time, and had started bleeding from her bottom and vomiting. She also lost her balance easily and couldn't leave the house without help.
20. About three months before her collapse she was so unwell that she literally couldn't get out of bed. She went to A&E about two days before the hospital admission and they told her she was dehydrated, gave her a drip and sent her home. In the meantime, she was bleeding internally and didn't know.
21. My mum was really depressed when she found out she had Hepatitis C. She used to be a happy person, but the shock of realising she had been living with this the whole time was too much for her. When she came out of hospital, she wasn't the same person anymore. They had put her in an induced coma and she was hallucinating at first, and then depressed.
22. After she was admitted to hospital and diagnosed, she remained in the ICU for a few weeks, but was later moved to a ward. She remained in hospital for about three months in total.

23. A month or two after being discharged from hospital she was put on a course of Harvoni treatment at the Freeman Hospital, but this was not successful. She was then given another course of the same treatment but on a higher dose, in about February 2016.
24. During her treatment, my mum experienced significant side effects. She was dizzy and nauseous to the extent that she required medication. She couldn't get out of bed without being sick, and had no appetite. The second course of treatment caused worse side effects as the dose was higher.
25. After six months on the second round of treatment, she was told she had cleared the Hepatitis C. However, a blood test three months after the end of the treatment showed that it had returned.
26. Following this, she had several MRI scans of her liver which showed that she had nodules. The doctors said they would monitor these, and the hepatitis nurse told her that if her blood count was a certain amount over 100 they would have to give her another course of treatment.
27. However, her next two blood tests came back with results in the 300s, and she was not offered any hepatitis treatment. The next time she saw the liver specialist for a scan, on 4 December 2016, they said that she had liver cancer which had spread to the portal vein and there was nothing they could do.
28. She went from being told not to worry and that she would be monitored and provided more treatment if necessary, to being told that she had three months to live.
29. She wanted to die at home, so she had carers in and had to change her house around. In the end I moved in with her. The last 7 days before she died she couldn't get out of bed anymore and they had sedated her. I was just watching waiting for her to die. She passed away on 13 February 2017, three months and one week after she had been given three months to live.
30. The cause of death on her death certificate is recorded as:

1(a) Hepatocellular Carcinoma

(b) Liver Cirrhosis

(c) Hepatitis C Virus Infection

31. I think that both her blood tests and liver scans should have been offered more regularly. She was having blood tests every 4 to 6 weeks, but was never offered any further treatment despite her increasingly alarming test results. Her blood test results were flagged up as dangerous, but then she was left to wait. Nodules were found on her liver but she was left three months before having another scan. I do not think was frequent enough given the advanced stage of her illness. A lot of deterioration can occur in three months and if they had caught it earlier they may have been able to save her. I went to every single appointment with her and they said it was just routine. But later I realised it shouldn't have been routine.
32. I am also concerned that we were misinformed about the state of her liver and the options available to her. We were given hope about treatments that were available for her, and then suddenly told at the next scan that she only had three months left.
33. It has been an awful time for the family. I had no one else; it was just me and my mum. I haven't seen my dad for 12 years, and I have no grandparents, siblings or aunts/uncles. It was me, my mum, and my two children who are now grown. My life basically ended. I had my own business, and I had to give everything up to look after her. I had no income coming in. I went into depression, to the point where I cried every day.
34. My mother's illness and death had a significant impact on my son and daughter. They were 17 and 19 at the time, and my son took it especially hard. It was a tough period for them.

35. My son and daughter both live at home with me; my son is working and my daughter is studying social work. Christmas is an especially difficult time for us as it was my mum's favourite time of year. She was always so excited to spend Christmas with us all together.
36. On Christmas Eve she would come to my house and would wake up the children at 4am to open their presents even when they were older. She used to start buying Christmas presents for the kids in July or August, up to 150 presents each, counting them to make sure they had the same amount. She was the most ridiculous person at Christmas. Now I don't even put up a Christmas tree anymore, as it's not the same.
37. Before her health deteriorated, my mum worked full time in an art gallery as a manager. She wanted to stay on as long as she could in case she got better, but in the end by about 2012, she could no longer travel to work without being sick, and could not focus enough to sit and do her job properly. She went off on sick leave at first and then eventually had to quit. She was 65 at the time, but had not intended to retire at that time as she very much enjoyed her job.
38. Unable to work, she then had to spend the last 6 months of her life going back and forth to the hospital, taking Hepatitis treatment and then dying of liver cancer. It must have been a terrible shock for her, and there was nothing we could do to make it better.
39. I had my own café and catering business, catering for buffets and weddings. When my mum was in hospital in 2014 and I was trying to juggle my work and caring for her at the same time, I closed down the business as it was too difficult, for what I thought would be a short period. Then when she came out of hospital, I had to help take her to weekly appointments at two different hospitals, one of which was 40 minutes' drive away, so I kept the business closed. It ended up being closed for 6 months. When I opened it up again, I still ended up having to close early in the day most days because she would phone me saying she had had a fall or was upset about something. I had staff running it without me for a

little while, but it was too busy and in the end I had to get rid of it. I had to get rid of it fully in 2016 just before she died.

40. I haven't been back to work since she died. I cannot concentrate on anything. My only income is from my partner. He works away in Norway. If this hadn't happened I would still be working. I had my own business for 6 years before I gave it up, and before that I was a restaurant manager working 80 hours a week. I have worked since I was 14. Now I can't work anymore. I have been having nightmares because of the way she died, reliving her taking her last breath in my head.
41. My daughter's uni gave her some time off when my mum was poorly, and was generally supportive. However, both of my children found it stressful that she was so ill for such a long period of time. Anything could happen that would mean they suddenly had to leave college or uni to come see her in case she deteriorated quickly. They had to miss a lot of classes because they would get a call saying they needed to come see her and didn't know what would happen or if it would be the last time. This lasted two years; during that time they missed out on so much that they would have been doing.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

42. No one in our family has ever been offered any support. I think I should have been offered counselling support as I'm still not over it. I would participate in counselling if it were offered by the Inquiry.
43. I'm only 43 and I have never not worked, but I still don't feel like I'm emotionally strong enough to do anything at the moment. I think it's the way she died. If she had died naturally it would have been different.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

44. My mum received a grant of £20,000 from the Skipton Fund in 2015, about 9 months after her diagnosis. This was not a straightforward process. The Skipton Fund initially said that the application hadn't been filled in properly, so we had to send it back and forth about 4 times because the doctor hadn't filled in his part correctly. We heard about the Skipton Fund from my mum's hepatology nurse.
45. My mum received a second grant of £50,000 about a year later because she qualified for a Stage Two payment due to her liver cancer. This application process was more straightforward. She also began to receive regular payments from this point up until her death.
46. I applied for a discretionary grant from the Caxton Foundation when my mother passed to help pay for her funeral. I was given a payment for funeral costs, but it was not enough to cover the costs of the funeral so I had to borrow money to pay for it.
47. I also applied for a bereavement payment from the Caxton Foundation, but this was rejected as it is only for bereaved spouses or partners. I took this rejection to mean that I wouldn't be able to get any justice for my mum under the law so did not make any legal enquiries about possible negligence issues.
48. My first observation about the financial assistance available is that none of my mum's doctors told us about it. If the Hepatitis C nurse hadn't told us, as my mum visited her quite often, we wouldn't have known there was anything available. We were told in passing about 9 months after her diagnosis. I think somebody should have told us earlier – perhaps the doctor. It was only when she really started getting friendly with the Hep C nurse that the nurse started giving us more information and said there is actually a fund you can apply for assistance from.
49. I also don't think it's fair that there are payments only for spouses. My mum was single, and she only had me. I was the only family member. I was the one who

had to care for her and take off work and ended up losing income to do this. This is similar to what a partner would have done.

Section 8. Other Issues

50. I am quite shocked at the amount of people this has happened to. It never should have happened. Somebody should be held accountable. The amount of people who are dying daily because of it - whole families have been ripped apart. I cannot believe the fact the Government knew about it and still did it.
51. Whoever is responsible needs to admit what happened and take responsibility for it. All I want is for my mum to come back and that's not going to happen.
52. I have tried to apply for my mum's medical records but was told there were none available. After liaising back and forth with different agencies I was able to obtain a small amount of records pertaining to her stay at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C	
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Dated21 January 2021.....