

Witness Name: Judith Gidwell

Statement No.: WITN2140001

Exhibits:None

Dated: 3rd September 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JUDITH GIDWELL

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5th November 2018.

I, Judith Gidwell, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Judith Gidwell. My date of birth is GRO-C 1963. My address is known to the inquiry. I am a care support worker. I intend to speak about my contraction of hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me and my family.

Section 2. How Infected

2. In 1984, when I was 21 years of age, I started to become unwell. I became very breathless. I remember my father, James Gidwell, paid for me to see Dr Dagget, a private doctor somewhere in the Midlands, he referred me to Middlesex Hospital, Gough Street, London. At the hospital, it was

discovered that I had a hole in my heart that required open-heart surgery. I was put on the waiting list.

3. In June or July, I cannot remember the exact date, but I do remember that it was during the Wimbledon fortnight, I had my surgery at Middlesex Hospital. The specialist was Dr Swanton. During the course of the operation I was given a blood transfusion. This is how I contracted hepatitis C, by being given contaminated blood.
4. I do not believe I was given any information or advice beforehand about the risk of being exposed to infection. To be truthful, I was so scared about the surgery that I cannot remember much about what was said to me before the operation.
5. I was infected with chronic hepatitis C.
6. In January 2014, I received a phone call at home from a specialist at Stafford hospital. I cannot remember his name. He told me I had hepatitis C.
7. I was given no information to understand and manage the infection. I did not even know what hepatitis C was.
8. I had been very ill between 2010 and 2013 with various things. I was having dizzy spells and chickenpox symptoms. I was coming out with spots. I had a number of chest infections. I was having regular tests at Stafford hospital and they were taking my bloods. I believe I should have been told earlier that I had hepatitis C from the tests that they were doing at the time.
9. The way I found out that I had hepatitis C was a disgrace. Firstly, I should never have been told over the telephone about such a serious condition.

10. I remember the phone call I received informing me that I had hepatitis C very well. The doctor said to me over the phone *"Do you want the good news or the bad news?"*. He said *"You haven't got syphilis but you have got hepatitis C."* I remember I said I had been vaccinated for hepatitis. He said, *"You might have had a vaccination for hepatitis B but I can assure you there is no vaccination for hepatitis C."* He then asked if I was a prostitute. I was horrified. When I said no, he asked if I took part in rough anal sex. I could not believe what he was saying to me. Then he asked if I took drugs intravenously. I had never taken drugs in my life. He then asked if I was an alcoholic. He then asked me to make an appointment to see him.

11. He did not say anything further about the risks of others being infected as a result of my infection.

12. I did attend Stafford hospital but I did not see the doctor who had phoned me at home. I saw a Dr GRO-D who did tell me about the risks of others being infected. He did advise me to have my children tested.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I did not receive any other infection or infections as a result of being given contaminated blood.

Section 4. Consent

14. I do not know if I was treated or tested without my knowledge or consent. I do not know if I was treated or tested without being given adequate or full information or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

15. Up until 2005, I had always been a very healthy active person both at home and work, despite this I was still overweight.
16. Between 2010 and 2013, I developed many illnesses. These included pain in my gallbladder region. I also had chickenpox symptoms and was coming out with spots all over my skin. I had a constant issue with numerous clusters of boils in my arm pits. In 2013 I had a huge boil which was the size of a roll on deodorant drained under general anaesthetic in Stafford Hospital. I developed severe migraines and had constant chest infections. Mentally, I became depressed because I constantly felt ill.
17. I was constantly having tests at Stafford hospital to try and get to the bottom of my illnesses. I remember I had a tube put down my throat to look at my liver. I am sure they thought I was an alcoholic because they were always asking me about my alcohol intake. They were looking for signs that I was an alcoholic but they found nothing. I also had a bone marrow biopsy, numerous scans and a MRI scan. I was prescribed strong painkillers but was never diagnosed with any medical condition.
18. In January/February 2014, I was offered a six-month course of treatment by Dr GRO-D at Stafford hospital. This consisted of an injection of interferon once a week and taking ribavirin tablets daily.
19. I did not face any difficulties or obstacles in obtaining the treatment. It was offered to me. I formed the impression that it was the only treatment available.
20. When I was offered the treatment, I was not informed of the side-effects. The nurse told me I might experience some discomfort. Those six months has to be the worst time in my life.

21. Physically, I immediately became extremely fatigued. My skin was constantly itchy. My hair fell out, I lost 2 inches off my hairline. I lost around 2 stone in weight. I looked horrendous. Mentally, I was extremely depressed. I could not go out, I was so fatigued. My daughter had to look after me.
22. I had to go to Stafford hospital every month to see a nurse. Her name was GRO-D I remember I told her about how I felt mentally and what was happening to me physically. I remember she said "*It is unlikely it's the treatment that is causing the side-effects.*" It clearly was the treatment, I had never felt so ill and it was immediately as soon as I started the treatment.
23. There was no impact of being infected with hepatitis C on any other medical conditions. There was an impact on my dental care. When I informed my dentist in Cannock that I had hepatitis C, he made me feel dirty and infectious. The dentist wrote hepatitis C in capital letters with marker pen across my folder. He did say he would treat me but said I had to be the last person of the day. He would not treat another person after me for fear of infecting them. I remember feeling so dirty, it was horrible. I never went back to the dentist after that.
24. When I found out I was infected with hepatitis C I was horrified. I was not given much information about the infection so I had to look it up on the Internet. The waiting to find out if my children had been infected was horrendous. They were both upset and I was panic-stricken. Fortunately, both were clear.
25. Trying to find out how I had contracted the infection caused me a lot of worry and concern. At the time I was working with vulnerable adults, some of whom, were diabetics. I would do routine blood sugar tests with a needle prick pen. I was concerned that I had passed something on to them as well as contracting it. None of the service users were infected to my knowledge. I wondered if that is how I had contracted the infection. Dr

GRO-D informed me that I had contracted the infection by receiving contaminated blood when I had my transfusion in 1984.

26. Being infected with hepatitis C has ruined my life. I used to be an outgoing social person but now I am very private and rarely go out. I suffer with bowel problems and pain and my spleen. I have a lot of pain and discomfort in my joints. I now suffer with brain fog and have a very poor memory. The brain fog has left me unable to concentrate or calculate anything. I have found this to be very embarrassing and frustrating. As a result, I have lost all confidence in myself.
27. When I was on the treatment, my daughter was living with me. She had to do everything for me as I was unable to do anything for myself. Both my children were very worried about my health.
28. When I was informed that I had hepatitis C, the stigma surrounding the infection was apparent by the way the doctor spoke to me. It is associated with sex workers and drug takers. I did not tell anyone I had the infection as I knew I would be judged as being in either one of these categories.
29. Prior to starting the treatment I was about to do an NVQ 3 in challenging behaviour. I was so ill whilst on the treatment, I could not start the course and even if I had, I would not have been physically or mentally able to complete it. Working with adults with disabilities or challenging behaviour was my passion. I feel very frustrated because if I had not been infected with hepatitis C, I feel certain I would have had a managerial position by now.
30. As mentioned earlier between 2010 and 2013 I was very ill with various conditions. In hindsight, I now know this was because of my infection of hepatitis C. At the time I was working with Staffordshire county council as a carer. I was having to take time off work as I was constantly ill. I was never given a diagnosis as to what was wrong with me. I was subsequently sacked from my job in 2013.

31. In 2015, I was working for Richmond Fellowships in Cannock which provides people with respite care. Part of my role was working on a computer. Due to my brain fog, I could not concentrate on the computer work. I found it all so difficult. I decided to leave my job. Since October 2016, I work as a carer but I am only bank staff. There is no way, due to my fatigue and brain fog, that I could work full-time.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

32. I have never been offered or received any counselling or psychological support as a result of being infected with hepatitis C through receiving contaminated blood. Not only have I never been offered any counselling or psychological support, whenever I have mentioned my mental health to Mr **GRO-D** or my G.P. I am dismissed, treated like a hypochondriac and told none of my complaints have anything to do with Hepatitis C.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

33. **GRO-D** from Stafford Hospital first informed me that people who had contracted hepatitis C through contaminated blood could receive financial assistance.

34. In 2014, I received £20,000; this was from the Skipton fund. In 2018, I was informed I would receive £1000 every three months. This is from the England infected blood support scheme. I also received £1000 from the Skipton fund.

35. The process for applying for the £20,000 payment was straightforward. I received an application form and filled it in. I took it to Dr **GRO-D** who filled his part in, he sent it off to the Skipton fund.

36. The process of applying for the discretionary fund for household goods was a nightmare. I applied for a new settee, I had to get quotes. The

process was complicated and it made me feel like I was begging. Even though I did eventually receive a £1000 contribution towards the new settee, I decided I would not apply for anything else again.

37. I cannot remember if there were any preconditions imposed on the making of an application for, or obtaining financial assistance.

38. The amount of financial assistance I received does in no way compensates me for my ill-health. It is a drop in the ocean compared to what I would have earned if I had been fit and well throughout my working lifetime. I started an application for S.C.M stage 1 but neither Mr GRO-D or my doctor would commit to saying hepatitis C was to blame. My GP said he did not know enough about me or hepatitis C to feel comfortable even attempting to fill his part of the application form.

39. I am aware that people in Ireland and Italy have received substantial amounts of money after contracting hepatitis C. I believe the people who have been infected should get the same. This has destroyed many people's lives and it certainly has destroyed mine.

Section 8. Other Issues

40. I do not wish to remain anonymous in this inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed  Judith Sidwell (Sep 3, 2020 10:17 GMT+1)

Dated Sep 3, 2020