

Witness Name: Joel Denton

Statement No: WITN2685001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOEL DENTON

I, Joel Denton will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Joel Denton and I live at GRO-C Berkshire, GRO-C. I was born on GRO-C 1970. I am married and do not have children. In 2006 I broke my neck in four places during an accident and as a result am disabled and not able to work due to being diagnosed with Brown-Séquard like issues.
2. I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records.

Section 2. How infected

4. I was infected with Non A Non B Hepatitis, later renamed as Hepatitis C, on 16 October 1986 from a blood transfusion during an emergency operation following a knife attack at school.
5. I was only 15 years old when I got caught up in an argument that had nothing to do with me. I was leaving the dining hall at my school, Heston Community School, Osterley Park, Hounslow, when a group of boys aged in their 20s who had entered the school looking for someone, attacked me and stabbed me four times. I was rushed to West Middlesex Hospital.
6. I was unconscious but was later informed that my lung and diaphragm were punctured and I had to have a splenectomy. I also had a severed artery in my stomach.
7. It was by chance that Dr Courpalais, who was retired but had come in to collect his belongings, was spotted by my surgeons who were struggling to stop my bleeds and they asked him to help. He saved my life.
8. My operation lasted around six or seven hours and I was given between 30 to 40 pints of blood in multiple blood transfusions. These were the only blood transfusions that I had been given in my life. I also required 200 to 300 stitches inside and out.
9. After my operation I was in intensive care about a week and then in a ward for about eight days before I was discharged. I could not walk for nearly a year afterwards due to the extreme pain, and then it took another six months after that to get my self back to a relatively normal condition. Therefore I suffered from the aftermath of the operation for about 18 months in total.

10. During a Police interview the Police officer told me that all my food that I had eaten at lunch fell out onto my shoes after I was stabbed and explained to me how bad the injury was. The Police arrested the men who stabbed me; however I remember that at their trial the judge cried as she could not give them the severity of sentence that she wanted to; she could only give them 2 ½ years.
11. I received £850 compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) but I disputed the figure as I felt it was too low. I appealed the amount but I was on holiday when they had the appeal hearing so could not attend it. The CICB did not increase the amount of compensation and refused to revisit the matter.
12. My blood transfusion was done in an emergency situation and so no one asked for my or my parent's permission for my blood transfusions.
13. When I was about 18 or 19 years old, I received a letter from St. Mary's Hospital telling me that I needed to come in and have some tests. I think I asked what these tests were for and I assume that I was informed, however I can not now remember. I went in and I remember my appointment was very short. They simply said that I had had a blood transfusion and so there was a chance that I been infected with Hepatitis C. They proceeded to take my blood and then confirmed to me that I had been infected with Hepatitis C. I was told that I should consider myself lucky because it was only in the previous 18 to 24 months that they had started to scan for the HIV virus. I did not feel very lucky at all. They just told me that I had to have check-ups every six months.
14. The meeting was very brief and casual and was just like a normal conversation. I was informed that the infection could be spread by having sex, and so told to be careful. All this happened about two years after my infection and I was in a relationship with someone at the time. I believe that the hospital should have got in touch with me as soon as they were aware there was a potential risk of me

being infected with Hepatitis C. I feel that the two years delay before I was informed about this was disgraceful. I had already been in a relationship by this time and therefore there was a very real chance that could have infected numerous people. I do not remember being told about transmission of the infection via blood passing from one person to another, but I was told not to drink alcohol.

15. It really was not communicated well at all, let alone in any great depth. I believe that the risks should have been explained in a better way, especially considering my age and the fact the infection was so important, serious and infectious. I had not even heard of the Hepatitis C infection before that meeting and I still do not know much about it. I felt that I had been given no information on what would happen next, what to do, or any information about the nature of the infection.

16. I kept going back to St Mary's Hospital every six months for these routine check-ups. After about the third check-up, I was informed that I had cleared the Hepatitis C infection. This was about 18 months after I was first told of the infection. I have never had any follow up appointments after this.

17. Then about a year or two later St. Mary's Hospital again wrote to me again and said that they wanted me to come in to take part in their research on how some people clear Hepatitis C by themselves. I agreed to this and was sent a DNA swab which I completed and returned. After this I never heard back from them with confirmation that they had received the swab or with any results of this research.

18. On 20 October 2006 I had a serious accident at work when I fell through a skylight and landed on my head on a concrete floor. I broke my neck in four places and as a result developed symptoms like Brown-Séquard syndrome. I was taken to Charring Cross Hospital and then to Stoke Mandeville Hospital where the doctors were baffled as to the reason I had not been put on penicillin

permanently after my splenectomy operation in 1986. I was told that it was extremely important that I should have been taking penicillin from the operation as it was life threatening not to have it. I am on penicillin now and will be for the rest of my life.

Section 3. Other Infections

19. I have not been told, nor am I aware, that I have contracted any other infections from the infected blood transfusions in 1986.

Section 4. Consent

20. When St. Mary's Hospital first wrote to me to tell me that I may be infected with Hepatitis C, they told me that they wanted to test me to find out and so I agreed and gave my consent to testing. I felt that I did not have much of a choice other than to consent.

21. However, I feel that I was tested without any knowledge or full information about the seriousness of the infection.

22. I agreed to be tested for research into how some people clear Hepatitis C naturally.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

Psychological impact

23. I was told at 18 years old that I had a life changing disease, through no fault of my own, and that I could not drink alcohol and do other normal things that teenagers did. I was left alone to come up with every answer myself. I had no guidance and I think the hospital should have taken more care.

24. One of the hardest things about my Hepatitis C infection was not knowing anything about the infection. It naturally made me think the worst and it was constantly on my mind. I started doing my own research and saw the worst case scenario which I automatically applied to myself.
25. At the time I tried not to think about it and tried to think that it would not have an impact, but realised that it did. It put me in a bit of a depression and I just could not forget about it, so I was forced to confront the issue. Mentally the infection had a big impact on me and I believe that this was mainly due to my age. I remember constantly asking myself '*what have I got to look forward to?*' I was left to my own devices and it was difficult not having anyone to talk to.
26. Until the moment they told me that I was clear, I constantly worried for the future and what could happen. Even now, the worry does creep back into my mind. I have permanent scarring from the stabbing that then led to my infection and so this constantly serves as a reminder, stopping me from moving on.

Physical impact

27. I believe that my Hepatitis C also had an impact on my liver although I can not confirm this as I never had a liver scan. I was always a fit person but after my infection I became very fatigued and always felt drained.
28. I was never given any Hepatitis C treatment as I was told after my third check-up that I had cleared the Hepatitis C virus naturally. I did not even know this was possible. I never had another check up or test after this point.
29. I do not know if my infected status had any impact on other medical procedures I have had. I do not know whether any extra precautions were taken during the operation for my accident in 2006 as I was unconscious and rushed to Charring Cross Hospital.

30. The biggest issue I had with being infected with Hepatitis C at the time was with relationships. I used to dwell on having to tell girls about the infection and so used to shy away from putting myself in those situations. I believe that my infection has stopped me from being in some relationships and has meant that I was always worried about having kids and giving them the infection. I still worry today about what happened and what is going to happen to me in the future due to my past infection with Hepatitis C.
31. I was in a relationship when I was initially told about the Hepatitis C infection and I felt pressure to tell my girlfriend which was horrible. I was terrified but after about 18 months I told her as we were still close friends, even though we had split up by this time. I told her before I had been cleared of the infection but found it very hard to explain about it when I did not have any information about the infection myself. She was very understanding given the circumstances.
32. I only had two relationships while I was infected. My first relationship broke down because of the infection as I had to explain very personal experiences in great depth right at the start of a relationship and this therefore had a significant impact on the relationship. My second relationship broke down naturally, however, my girlfriend was still very concerned about Hepatitis C and she had a blood test and checked herself because she was so worried about becoming infected. She also wanted me to go and have a blood test too at the start of the relationship.
33. Even after clearing the infection, when I start new relationships I tell potential girlfriends about the past and I have had some negative reactions. I have told my wife that I am clear, as far as I am aware.
34. I don't really see my family and I have never been so close to them, so I do not feel it has had a significant impact on them. I was always by myself and had to deal with everything on my own.

35. I had very little contact with people after my infection. I was mainly just interacting with the people at St. Mary's Hospital at my check-ups every six months.
36. My stabbing and the infection all occurred while I was in the middle of my O-Levels and so I had to do them at home and this undoubtedly hampered my performance. The school did not want all the publicity of the attack and so they refused to let me come back to school once I had recovered enough. I was expelled and so essentially left school aged just 15 when I was stabbed. This negatively impacted my education and shattered my dreams just as they were meant to be beginning.
37. I was supposed to sit eight to nine O-Levels but ended up sitting just two in English and Maths, which I passed. I had always planned to complete my education in school, continue to A-Levels and then go on to university and further education and obtain my qualifications. Instead, aged 16, I decided to go to college to do a plumbing course. It was a two year course; however, I did not manage to finish it. I was just constantly tired and was struggling to keep up. I found it difficult to walk too. This was around the time I received the letter from St. Mary's Hospital indicating I may have Hepatitis C.
38. After I left the plumbing course I went to do roofing work, as I simply had to take what work was available. It was a very physical job and I was still recovering from my operation at the time and still struggling to walk. I managed to get by and although I was very fit before all of this, I never got back to more than around 70% of where I was physically before the operation.
39. I do feel that I have suffered financially from a loss of earnings as I could have done a lot better for myself in life. I understand that there are other circumstances in life but I feel that the opportunity was taken away from me at a very young age.

Stigma

40. I had told people previously about my infection and I had bad reactions to it, as it scared them away. As a result I stopped telling people about my infection due to the stigma attached to it. People linked Hepatitis C to HIV and so because I did not know anything about Hepatitis C myself, I did not know how to explain my situation, which would lead people to assume that I had AIDS. This was not something that I wanted to broadcast, especially at that time when the stigma around HIV was significantly bad. After I was cleared it was slightly easier to tell people.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

41. I have never been offered counselling or psychological support at any stage.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

42. I only found out about Skipton Fund about nine months ago. However, after contacting them they told me that because I cleared the Hepatitis C virus, I was not entitled to anything from them.

43. I have never received any compensation in relation to my Hepatitis C infection.

Section 8. Other Issues

44. It would be good to finally get answers to questions I, and I am sure others have had, such as why did this happen, how did it come to be that I was given infected blood and who was responsible for it.

45. I have heard that they were aware of the risks of contamination but they still used the infected blood. I want answers and I need answers for some sort of closure at the very least. I do not understand why they continued to give out the blood and

not inform me if they knew my blood transfusions had a risk of being infected with Hepatitis C.

46. I want to know who was responsible for purchasing this blood. I believe that it was outrageous to even consider using it. I got lucky and it could have been so much worse.

Anonymity

47. I do not wish to remain anonymous

48. I would like to give oral evidence if it would at all help.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed... GRO-C GRO-C

Dated... 26-02-2019