

Witness Name: Alison Wood
Statement No.: WITN3600001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 1/10/19

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ALISON WOOD

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 4th August 2019.

I, Alison Wood, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Alison Wood. My date of birth is GRO-C 1967 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am single and I have a 12-year-old daughter.
2. My father, John, died on the 27th January 1993. I intend to speak about how my father came to be infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment received and the impact it had on him and our family.

Section 2. How Affected

3. Dad suffered for many years with heart problems and this resulted in him having a heart bypass operation at the London Chest Hospital in December of 1982. I understand that Dad's operation was a success, however I also understand from Mum, that in the aftermath of his operation, Dad never seemed to regain his energy and he was constantly tired. There were no obvious signs of improvement after he'd had the operation. This was disappointing and worrying at the same time.
4. I was 15 at the time and still in school. I remember thinking every time the teacher came into the class room she was going to tell me that something bad had happened to my dad. It was on my mind all the time.
5. I also remember seeking reassurance from my biology teacher that my dad's operation would go okay and that he would recover. My teacher told me that these days, a heart bypass operation is fairly routine and that reassured me.
6. Dad worked as a manager for British Telecom, based in the City of London, and he took some months off work after his operation. Prior to his operation, Dad would frequently cycle to and from the station to catch the train into London for work. After his operation however, I remember that Mum would invariably take him to the station and then pick him up after work as he was too tired to either cycle or walk.
7. During the period of time following Dad's operation and up to his death, I worked in London and I was obsessed with making sure he was okay. I couldn't bear the thought of him not getting a seat on the train and I used to always get to the station early so that I could save Dad a seat on the train. I would stand for the entire journey but I was glad that Dad could sit down. He never asked me to do this for him and I suppose subconsciously I must have been aware that he had not been well.

8. Dad retired at some point towards the end of 1992, in October or November, and we threw him a retirement party at my parent's place. He had lost a lot of weight and it was obvious that he wasn't well.
9. Following his retirement, I arranged for Mum and Dad to go on a holiday. I worked for an airline company and I booked my parents business class tickets to America so that they could have a two-week holiday in Florida. I remember hearing from Mum, that Dad wasn't very well during the holiday and I also remember seeing photographs of their holiday and thinking Dad didn't look well. Neither did he really look like he was enjoying himself.
10. Dad was the type of person who would suffer in silence and just get on with it so I don't remember thinking his demeanour had changed all that much during the years following his operation and before his death.
11. Around Christmas of 1992, I remember seeing Dad from afar in town. He was buying a Christmas present for mum and from a distance and in that context, it really struck me that he didn't look well at all. I hated Dad being ill and I felt really bad that he was going to these great lengths to buy mum a present when he obviously didn't feel well. I was really concerned for him.
12. Coming up to Christmas of that year, Dad's condition seemed to become worse. I know he was home for Christmas and I can't recall the exact date but his condition was deteriorating so much that it resulted in him having to go into hospital. He had an episode in bed where he had a major fit. I remember mum shouting and it being very distressing. When he was admitted into hospital, it was really worrying as we had no idea what was wrong with him. He never came out of hospital and it was all very quickly downhill after that.
13. During that period of time, the family would attend the hospital in between work but we had no idea what was wrong with him. Even the doctors were questioning it. I would call in on my way home from work

and I would dread going in there as I was never sure how he would be and what I was going to see.

14. It was right towards the end when we found out that Dad was HIV positive. While I've blocked a lot of what happened out, I do remember that Mum was taken aside by a doctor and told about Dad's HIV diagnosis. When they came back, the doctor asked Mum whether he should tell us children and Mum said yes, of course.
15. I don't remember how it was told to us that Dad had been diagnosed with HIV but I remember I just ran out of the room. These memories are really painful and I haven't thought about this time for years so I can't remember what I did when I ran out of the room. All I know is that up until that point I thought he could get better. As soon as I was told he had HIV, I knew that he was going to die. I knew HIV to be a really horrific disease that killed people and that had horrible connotations attached to it. Most of all I was devastated that my dad was going to die but the stigma of HIV compounded the impact that it had upon me.
16. After we were informed Dad was HIV positive, I couldn't understand how it had happened. To me, was such a clean-living, decent man, but in the back of my mind I knew that he must have contracted it somehow. I did start to doubt his character. I thought about the business trips he would go on and the questions of what he what he might have been getting up to naturally occurred to me. For some time, I was thinking the worst of him, as I thought he might have contracted HIV from one of the commonly publicised ways you can get it, such as through sexual contact or needle sharing drug misuse. However, none of those fitted with the person I knew, or at least at that time, what I thought my Dad to be. Never did it occur to me that he might have got it from a blood transfusion.
17. In Dad's last days, we the family had been visiting him in hospital quite often. We are not generally a very tactile family but I remember sitting

next to him holding his hand the whole time because I wanted him to know we were there.

18. Then on Dad's final day, we had been at the hospital visiting Dad and had got home late. Mum got a call and it seemed we should go back, so we did. Once we were back, we were asked to leave the room so that the nurses could turn Dad, to prevent bed sores from developing. I remember them calling us back into his room quickly, as they must have known that the end of his life was imminent. I knew he was dying. Mum grabbed hold of Dad and I went to grab Mum but she pushed me away and just held onto Dad. I just remember her saying 'no, no, no' over and over.

Section 3. Other Infections

19. To my knowledge, Dad only received HIV as a result of receiving infected blood during a blood transfusion.

Section 4. Consent

20. I have no knowledge of Dad being treated without his consent or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

21. After Dad's death, sheer panic ran through the family. I wouldn't say my mum was in despair, as that isn't the type of person that she is, but she is a worrier and at that point in time she was panicking and wasn't sure what she should do. We were all in crisis really and I remember thinking how I just wished someone else could take over and help us.

22. Without a shadow of a doubt, in life Dad did everything for Mum and she depended on him greatly. It was, I suppose what would be termed as an old fashioned or traditional 'man of the house' kind of role but not just

household things, emotionally too, Dad was her rock. Mum worried all the time and Dad never worried as he was always very pragmatic and controlled. If I was scared about something, Dad would give me advice and he would always sort it out. We all really depended on him, not just Mum.

23. Dad continued to look after us right up until the end. I remember in late December of 1992 he was having to write cheques and he had found that really hard as he had deteriorated so much. He was the cornerstone of our family and all of a sudden, we realised that he couldn't be that person for us anymore. It was very frightening for all of us.
24. I felt so sorry for my dad as it was just not fair. He was such a nice man and it was a seriously horrible thing for him to have to go through. I remember reading his notes in the hospital and it had said that he might have been scared. He was unconscious at this point, however the staff thought he might have been able to hear us so they wanted us to be careful about what he said around him. I hated the thought that he might have been frightened.
25. After Dad's death, we were told that he couldn't be buried because he was 'contaminated', which was a really awful thing to hear. We would not have buried Dad anyway but regardless of whether we wanted to or not, being told that he was 'contaminated' was horrible. It was like he was dirty.
26. It took nearly 10 years for me to tell anyone close to me about what had happened to Dad. I told a close friend of mine who I worked with at the time and only recently did I tell my daughter. At school, children in my daughter's year were laughing and calling other kids 'gay' and saying they have AIDS. I had to explain to her that you don't ever laugh at that and that it's a horrible disease. It's not a joke and it's not dirty. I told her that her grandad had died from AIDS and she was extremely upset and shocked by that news.

27. No one who I told about Dad's real cause of death, reacted negatively but I did pick who I told wisely. I don't tell many people about what happened to Dad, not because I carry a sense of shame, but because I don't want my dad's memory to be sullied by small talk and people drawing their own conclusions on how he could have contracted HIV.
28. Following Dad's death, I wasn't offered counselling but about 10 years after he died I sought it myself. I had terrible anxiety and panic attacks surrounding HIV. I became completely convinced that if Dad could contract HIV then I could too. Every little thing I did, I thought I might have AIDS. I had counselling weekly for six months through the National Health Service. My counsellor told me I should get an AIDS test but I couldn't make myself. I underwent Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, where you have to expose yourself to whatever your fear is. She made me write over and over again 'I have AIDS and I'm going to die'. I finally made myself have an AIDS test. The therapy and counselling was a great help but I did have ten years of after effects that could have been ameliorated much earlier.
29. I was worried about my Dad's health from when I was 15 and then when we found out he was HIV positive my worst fear came true. I think my thought process was that Dad was the head of our family and if that could happen to him, then it could happen to any of us. I was very distressed by the whole thing and it wasn't helped by the fact that I couldn't talk to anyone about it. I would lie to people about what had happened to Dad. I told them he'd had a heart condition and I'd brush over it. Sometimes, if I didn't know the person, I wouldn't even tell them he had died, I would say that he had retired.
30. Sometime after Dad had died, the family went on a holiday to Mexico. At the time, I was in a complete panic and convinced that I had AIDS. A long time before Dad had died I'd had skin cancer on my nose. It was mild and at the time I never gave it a second thought. My dad wasn't worried by it, so I wasn't worried either. But later, I learnt that cancer was a symptom of HIV and I then began to question why else would I have

developed cancer on my nose? As a result of that, in Mexico I was a nightmare and really horrible to Mum and my brother Chris because I was so worried about having AIDS. Chris was watching a documentary on AIDS and I completely lost it and yelled at him to turn it off. I realise that none of this is logical or rational, but at the time that is how I felt.

31. In 2000, I had to take leave from my job with an airline company because of the stress from the aftermath of my dad's death and everything that happened. I had worked there for 10 years or more and after I had taken leave, I took a voluntary redundancy pay-out as I couldn't work there anymore. I associated my job with my dad as I started working for the airline around the time when Dad had become sick and I would visit him in hospital after work.

32. My feelings and psychological wellbeing have changed since the birth of my daughter. I now have something to look after and I have to take my dad's position in my family. I felt so happy after her birth that I had forgotten the feeling that something bad might happen. I felt untouchable. When Dad was around I remember I used to feel like that, there was never anything to worry about, because he was there.

33. I really feel sad for my dad. He was robbed. He had worked so hard his whole life and he'd saved his money for his retirement. He didn't lead an extravagant life and he was such a nice man and really didn't deserve what happened to him. I know no one deserves that, but he really didn't.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

34. No psychological support was provided to me or my family, however I do believe there was a health visitor who came around to our house to provide us with advice about HIV. It certainly could not have been classed as counselling.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

35. I am aware that my mum applied for and received payment from a fund concerning victims and their families who contracted HIV via contaminated blood.

Section 8. Other Issues

36. I found out from my Mum sometime after my Dad had died, that the doctors had told her he had contracted HIV from the blood transfusion he had received during his heart bypass operation. Finding out this information didn't change the way I had felt about what had happened to my Dad.

37. I wasn't aware of how big of a problem contaminated blood was. I have since learnt where the blood had come from and the lack of checks and balances that were put in place to ensure that the blood given to patients was safe.

38. It is truly scandalous that this was allowed to happen and I hope this Inquiry established how it happened and once it was known, how it was allowed to continue before something was done about it.

39. I hope the results of this Inquiry will bring this scandal into the public eye and vindicate the memories of all the people who have suffered as a result of contaminated blood.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

1/10/19

