

Witness Name: Sheila French

Statement No.: WITN3297001

Exhibits: WITN3297002 - 012

Dated: 18th November 2019.

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SHEILA FRENCH

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 23 July 2019.

I, Sheila French, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sheila French. My date of birth is [GRO-C] 1944 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I have two children with my husband, Peter. My son, Paul was born [GRO-C] 1973, my daughter, Angela was born [GRO-C] 1975 and my husband's date of birth is [GRO-C] 1939.
2. My family are present today to assist with my statement as my memory has suffered. Paul had to leave part way through the statement due to work commitments. He will be giving his own statement as an affected witness.

3. I intend to speak about my blood transfusion which infected me with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.
4. I work at Bournemouth Hospital as a volunteer. In a way I believe it is pay-back for all the time I have spent in hospitals. I also work as a teaching assistant as a volunteer, in my local school.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I would consider myself as healthy before [GRO-C] 1973. Before this date, the worst thing I suffered from was the chickenpox virus.
6. I was infected with Hepatitis C on the [GRO-C] 1973 following my son's birth. My son was born on [GRO-C] 1973 in Queen Charlotte's Hospital.
7. Two weeks before my son's birth, my husband and I went to hospital as this was my due date. The hospital told me it was a false alarm and I was not in labour. I left the hospital and went home.
8. On the [GRO-C] 1973, I returned to the hospital and was told I did not appear to be ready. At this time, I was 2-3 weeks overdue. However, the obstetrician said the baby was very large and I was induced with oxytocin.
9. The birth was complicated as my son was a 'distressed baby'. I had epidural and high forceps were used for the delivery. After the birth, they accidentally left part of the placenta in the womb.
10. On Wednesday, [GRO-C] I went to the toilet in a wheelchair for a urine test. I passed three lumps of clotted blood in a jug and was immediately transferred to the fourth-floor (isolation) under Sister Hawkins. They took my baby away as I could not feed him.

11. On Sunday GRO-C I heard a baby cry, and went to the door and a nurse told me to go back into my room. I stepped back and blood started pouring out of me. My stitches had broken and I was lifted back into bed.
12. A doctor was called to check me, to which he rhetorically said, 'do you realise I left the pub to see you?' I was very ill at this time and filled bed pans with blood as a postpartum haemorrhage had taken place.
13. At this stage, I was semi-conscious. The surgeon wanted to perform a hysterectomy. A physiotherapist was called and tubes were used to suck out fluid from my lungs. I was too congested and could not be anaesthetised. My surgeon asked Peter to sign a piece of paper, 'sign here, this allows me to do anything to save her!'.
14. I went into theatre; the surgeon stopped the bleeding but I lost 14 pints of blood. The surgeon packed my uterus with dressings as I was too weak for the surgeon to perform a hysterectomy and hoped to operate the following day.
15. During this period, I was transfused 14 pints of blood and I believe this is when I was infected with contaminated blood. The hospital said this was the biggest transfusion for postpartum haemorrhage the hospital had performed.
16. The surgeon told my husband that I may be strong enough to withstand the operation the following day, but only if there were no bleeds.
17. After 24 hours, I was back in surgery and I had my dressings removed and stitched up. The surgeon said that the repair was difficult and that he couldn't perform miracles.

18. I was placed back into isolation. The room next door to mine, had a sign that read 'Factor VIII'. But I did not know what it was at the time. After the operation, I was in hospital for three weeks.
19. Six months later, I had my third surgery to try to repair the damage. However, that surgeon said it was only partly successful.
20. In the subsequent years, I frequently went to my GP as I was not well. I had aches and pains, depression, and lassitude.
21. I have been told that I had catatonic sleeps and if I was awoken I was highly irritable. I had pain in my stomach area (with hindsight this would be liver issues), and many digestive issues and allergies. My GP thought it was in my mind.
22. In 1981, my boss at my firm asked my husband, Peter, 'what was wrong with me? She is not doing well at work, and is getting angry'. Peter replied that he didn't know what the issue was, but that she has been like this for a long time.
23. Following this job, I worked as a Sales Assistant at Peter Jones, Sloane Square (John Lewis). In October 1991, my friend Thelma persuaded me to donate blood to the British Transfusion Service. I only agreed because we were getting a 30 minute break from work and some tea and biscuits.
24. I had never given blood before. In October 1991, one week later after donating my blood, I was sent a letter explaining that I had Hepatitis C and to contact my GP, I still have this letter and it is produced as exhibit **WITN3297002**. A leaflet came with the latter exhibit **WITN3297003**.

25. My GP sent me to Charing Cross Hospital for tests. I tested positive for the PCR test and they found that I had Hepatitis C (HCV) Genotype 1A.
26. Initially, I was told not to worry. My family were all tested for Hepatitis C and were found to be all clear.
27. Dr R Rumian, my GP apologised for not helping sooner. He said "not many people knew about Non-A Non-B Hepatitis (NANBH)". I was referred to Dr Murray-Lyon at Charing Cross Hospital.
28. I had 5 years without treatment or medication.
29. In October 1996, I was elected for a clinical drug trial at the Clementine Churchill Hospital, Harrow. I still worked at Peter Jones and I would have to take Saturdays and Sundays off for the trial for 12 weeks.
30. In the hospital they would take blood, on the hour every hour. At home I would inject myself with Interferon three times a week in the stomach. I also took Ribavirin tablets daily.
31. After 3 ½ months the hospital took a PCR test. My hepatic nurse from Charing Cross, David phoned me to say "stop the treatment" as my viral loads had not changed (improved). I was very upset.
32. During the treatment I suffered from quite severe side effects, including feeling suicidal. I collapsed one day, during the clinical trial as I was so ill. I went to group therapy but sometimes this made me more depressed listening to the stories they told.
33. During the clinical trial, I tried to take my life by taking tablets in my bathroom after having a row with my family. I was rushed to Charing Cross Hospital and they gave me activated charcoal. At a later stage, I also tried to jump out of a moving car.

34. When Dr Murray-Lyon retired in 2002 I was transferred to Dr Michael Anderson at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. I had regular check-ups regarding PCR and liver functions tests.
35. In Autumn 2015, I received a phone call from Dr Michael Anderson telling me there was a cure for Hepatitis C. In Mid- October, I started Harvoni and Ribavirin treatment.
36. The Harvoni and Ribavirin treatment lasted 3 months (costing approximately £35k). This cured me of the virus however there were bad side effects.
37. On Christmas Day 2015 during the treatment, I could not leave my bed until 1pm. My grandchildren were waiting to open their presents with their grandmother. I came down for a while but had to return to sleep.
38. This was a difficult time for the family. I had poor sleep during this time and I suffered from exhaustion and nausea.
39. Since the treatment, I am now sensitive to loud noises. The sound sensitivity means I start shaking uncontrollably. It has also affected my memory.

Section 3. Other Infections

40. Whilst I was in Turkey on holiday in 2012, I suddenly had a strange pain. Something told me to go to the local hospital.
41. I had an ultrasound. My husband sat opposite me in the room. When the radiologist had finished, I asked him if he found anything wrong. He replied, "you have a cyst on your ovary". I breathed a sigh of relief, but he had not finished the sentence. He said and "a mass on your liver".

42. I immediately contacted Dr M Anderson's secretary, and she emailed me with an appointment to see him on my return. Tests were ordered by Dr M Anderson, and I was immediately transferred to Kings College Hospital, London under Professor Nigel Heaton.

43. When I was transferred to Kings College Hospital I had a liver biopsy and cancer was found.

44. In January 2013, Professor Nigel Heaton operated and removed the left lobe of my liver. Following the operation, I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Extra- Marginal Zone Lymphoma.

45. I was 69 years old at the time of the operation. Professor Nigel Heaton warned me that if the operation was not successful, that I could only be on the liver transplant register for nine months. After 70 years old I would have been removed.

46. The surgery has improved my liver functioning, from cirrhosis to fibrosis.

Section 4. Consent

47. On GRO-C 1973, my husband, Peter was informed that I would have a blood transfusion, as I was not conscious and I had lost a lot of blood. He signed a consent form for the surgeon to act accordingly, during the surgery to help save my life.

48. There was no information given about the risk, but consent was given to the doctor to do what he needed to do.

Section 5. Impact

Physical and Mental impact of Hepatitis C

49. As previously stated, I have a list of physical symptoms that I have suffered from over the years.
50. My family has informed me before 1991 that I suffered from depression, arthritis, lassitude, catatonic sleeps, anger issues, stomach pains, digestive issues and food intolerances. But I do not recall this.
51. I have also suffered from a vitamin B12 deficiency. My liver does not store vitamin B12. I previously took tablets for this, but recently I have needed injections.
52. This deficiency has affected my health regarding energy levels, sleep, unexplained fatigue, muscle weakness and mood changes. More recently, my shortness of breath and forgetfulness has suffered greatly.
53. Before 1991, when I went to my GP asking for help, he thought it was all in my mind. Even when I was diagnosed with NANBH, I did not receive any significant help. I was not offered any medication until the clinical trial, which was 5 years after my diagnosis.
54. Post 1991, I developed episodes of gastritis, ulcers in my stomach, reflux, Helicobacter Pylori, Lymphoma, memory loss and Cirrhosis.
55. During my children's childhood, I frequently had endoscopies. My children knew I was not well. Often, I would eat and throw up after meals. I would be tired and lethargic.
56. My mental health has also suffered. The clinical trial was particularly stressful because it failed. My viral loads remained the same. I was so sad, and I tried to commit suicide twice.

57. I have been told that I had anger issues if I was awoken from my catatonic sleeps. This all took a great toll on my family.

Impact of Treatment

58. The clinical trial was ineffective to my Hepatitis C, as I had Genotype 1A. But the Harvoni and Ribavirin treatment in 2015, cured me.

59. But the treatment had side effects. I shake uncontrollably as I am sensitive to sound.

Impact on Family Members

60. My children only knew me as being sick. They have watched me throw up after meals, go to the hospital frequently and it has significantly shaped their lives. My son, Paul will give a statement as to how it has affected him personally.

61. My husband Peter has had to look after me and my family. He has kept my family together. He would take care of me on his own. He would not tell our children explicitly what was wrong with me. He tried to protect them as best he could. He was a very good father.

62. But it affected him psychologically. There was such a stigma with Hepatitis C. I would never tell anyone, I was so ashamed of it. I thought they would think I took drugs or got it through alcoholism. In 1991, the day I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C I immediately stopped drinking alcohol. I didn't drink much anyway.

63. I did not want people to know about my Hepatitis C infection. I felt dirty. I had two friends who knew, one being Thelma, who encouraged me to donate blood when I worked in Peter Jones. I am very grateful to her.

Financial Impact

64. I had a salary with John Lewis so it did not affect me financially. However it did hurt my husband and therefore my family.
65. Peter was self-employed. He would take me to hospital appointments, but if he didn't work he would effectively not get paid. He had two launderettes, and worked in the building industry. In 1980, he started his engineering business, taking too much time off cost us a lot. From 1988 to 1993 our financial woes were particularly difficult.
66. Both my parents and Peter's parents lived close by. Therefore they helped with looking after my children and much more. I would not want to think of the consequences had our parents not been able to care for us.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

67. Peter was considering legal proceedings if I did not get the Interferon and Ribavirin drugs. However I was put on the clinical trial in 1996, but It did not work.
68. In exhibit **WITN3297012**, a letter between my doctors discusses how counselling services would be 'helpful' for me. However I do not recall being offered counselling during these difficult times. In addition, my family has not been offered counselling services.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

69. Initially I was financially assisted by the Skipton Fund in 2004. Dr Anderson filled out an application for me. I was invoiced £100 for his professional fees exhibit **WITN3297007**.

70. I had an initial payout of £20k as I demonstrated that I had Hepatitis C. I also received monthly payments.

71. In 2013, I received £50k, in addition to ongoing payments. This was for my liver cancer under the EIBSS fund.

72. I recently received an increase in my monthly payments, and this has greatly helped our lives. There is less stress regarding money now.

Section 8. Other Issues

73. I have no recollection of any waivers that I have signed.

74. My family and I did not understand the virus. My daughter Angela recalls that my grandchildren could not eat off my fork. I would get mad in case they got the virus. We wouldn't share a toothbrush, or ice-cream. It was just normal not to share items with me. This is when there was so little information about how it was spread.

75. There has been so much pain and shame over the decades for me.

76. I am a volunteer raising money for my local hospital as a pay-back for all the kindness I have received from various doctors over the years.

77. To end on a positive note, I can say that all my Consultants and other medical staff, to name a few- Dr Murray Lyon, Dr Michael Anderson, and all in the Hepatology department at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, Professor Nigel Heaton and Dr Robert Marcus at Kings College Hospital, Dr Helen McCarthy at Royal Bournemouth Hospital, not forgetting everyone at my GP Practice (Denmark Road Medical Centre, Bournemouth) left no stone unturned. I am still being monitored at Royal Bournemouth Hospital. Thank you all, amen!

I have given some other papers that I have to the Inquiry Investigators these are listed here:

Exhibit number	Date	Comment
WITN3297002	'As post mark'	Letter from South Thames Blood Transfusion Service 'Possibility that you might have been in contact with this virus' (Hepatitis C)
WITN3297003	Not dated	Leaflet that came with letter above (Ref: RB/STBT/8/91)
WITN3297004	06/01/2016	Letter on headed note paper of Dr Michael G Anderson MD, FRCP. Diagnosis: Including <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hepatitis C, genotype 1A, 2. Lymphoma, liver resected sphincter repair in 1999 3. Previous exposure to standard Interferon and Ribavirin in 1997 and non-responded to treatment
WITN3297005	Not separately dated	Page 2 of above
WITN3297006	20/09/2004	Letter on headed note paper of Dr Michael G Anderson MD, FRCP. Re Skipton Fund application
WITN3297007	Not separately dated	Page 2 of above Invoice number 9189 for Initial Consultation £100
WITN3297008	19/09/2004	Page 3 of above Part of Skipton Fund application form
WITN3297009	Not separately dated	Page 4 of above Part of Skipton Fund application form, signed by Dr Anderson

WITN3297010	Documents dated separately	Medical Records for Sheila French at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.
WITN3297011	Document undated	Document contains Peter French's recollection of Sheila's health and impact infection has had on his family.
WITN3297012	12 June 1997	Letter Dr Vlavianos to Dr Kukulski. Document discusses depression and that counselling would be helpful for SF.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

18th November, 2019.