

Witness Name: Jonathan Blevins

Statement No.: WITN3303001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JONATHAN BLEVINS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 11 July 2019.

I, Jonathan Blevins, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Jonathan Blevins. My date of birth is GRO-C 1968 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I live with my 18-year old daughter. I was married in 2000 and my wife passed away on 30 October 2011. Her death was unrelated to Hepatitis C.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

3. I was infected with Hepatitis C when I received a blood transfusion after a serious motorbike accident.
4. The motorbike accident occurred in summer 1987. I was travelling at around 20 miles an hour when the back end of the bike slipped out, I hit a kerb, and then hit a lamp post.
5. I suffered serious injuries from the accident. The whole of my right leg and knee were completely shattered to pieces. I was taken to St Peter's Hospital, Chertsey Surrey, for surgery.
6. They were going to amputate my leg, it was injured that badly. In the end doctors ended up rebuilding my leg. I had some bone taken from my hip to rebuild part of my knee and I was given a new knee cap.
7. Initially, I could only see a graze on my knee, and it wasn't until I went into surgery that they were able to assess the damage and see how serious the injury actually was.
8. I was only meant to be in surgery for an hour, but ended up being in there for 9 hours as my leg was injured so badly. It was very difficult for my mum, waiting all of that time.
9. During the surgery, I had blood transfusions. As I was in the operating theatre for 9 hours, and they had to rebuild my leg, I imagine that I would have had many transfusions. I don't know how many pints of blood I received. That wasn't in my mind at the time, I was just glad to have my leg saved.
10. After the accident, I was in hospital for about 9 months in total. After the surgery at St Peter's, I was sent to the nearby Rowley Bristow Hospital in Chertsey for recovery and rehabilitation. Rowley Bristow no longer exists in its own right.

11. After my recovery, I carried on life as normal, without a care in the world.
After the accident and my recovery, I began donating blood.
12. The first time I gave blood was in 1993 in Dartford. I then moved due to work to [GRO-C] in Scotland, as I was working on the Annan to Lockerby motorway project, and I donated blood there. I don't remember the exact names of the places where I gave blood.
13. I then moved back to my home town of [GRO-C] in Surrey and gave blood there. I don't remember the exact name of the place where I gave blood, just that it was in a centre in nearby Walton on Thames, and was located in a public hall.
14. I would say that during this period when I was giving blood, I was donating regularly, which would have been around every 3 months or so. It was not until I moved to Devon and gave blood there that I was notified that I had Hepatitis C.
15. I moved to Devon with my wife in around 1998/1999. When I was in Devon, I went to give blood again. I remember that I went to give blood in Bideford in Devon, however I can't remember the name of the actual centre where I gave blood.
16. They took my blood, and after I donated I received a letter from the centre informing me that they could not use my blood as it was tainted with Hepatitis C. In the letter they referred me to a Consultant at Barnstable Hospital.
17. I was gobsmacked when I received the letter informing me that I had Hepatitis C.
18. I attended Barnstable Hospital in North Devon to see a Consultant after I received the letter. I do not remember the name of the Consultant. I had a biopsy and the Consultant told me that I only had what he called a "scarring" of Hepatitis C.

19. He said not to worry, that nothing was active, the virus was not doing anything, and to carry on with my life as normal. However, he informed me that I couldn't give blood anymore. I did not receive any treatment from the Consultant.

20. I did not like the Consultant. As far as I was concerned, it was like he didn't want to know and he didn't care.

21. I was not given any information about Hepatitis C, its treatment, or the risk of infecting others, by the Consultant. He just told me words to the effect of "you have nothing to worry about Mr. Blevins".

22. So, I carried on with my life. I was obviously a bit concerned GRO-C

GRO-C

23. I have previously tried to obtain my historic medical records but hit a brick wall. St Peter's Hospital Chertsey said they could not find anything about me or even a record of the operation. My parents have most of my medical information (no formal records though).

24. I moved back to GRO-C from Devon. In 2014, I went to see my doctor in Weybridge about something, and he was concerned about the fact that I had not had any subsequent blood tests to check up on my Hepatitis C.

25. I told him that I wasn't told to have follow up tests, and that the Consultant told me not to worry and to carry on with my life as normal. I was not given any information or advice from my doctor at Weybridge to help me understand and manage the Hepatitis C infection but he did advise me to have a further blood test.

26. The Weybridge doctor referred me to the Haematology Department at Guildford Hospital. When I was tested at Guildford, they said that I had the highest strain of Hepatitis C that they had seen in a long time, and

that my white blood cells were non-existent. That was a massive kick in the head for me. I was shell-shocked. I was generally looking healthy and I did not really have any symptoms.

27. The doctors at Guildford put me on a 2-stage treatment plan right away. My treatment involved receiving Interferon injections and taking Ribavirin tablets. I was required to have 1 Interferon injection per week and I had the Ribavirin tablets daily. I took 200mg of Ribavirin 3 times per day.

28. I was advised to start both forms of treatment at the same time right away because the strain of Hepatitis C in my system was so high. I had the treatment for the course of 1 year.

29. After the period of 1 year, the treatment was successful and the infection seemingly cleared. I had a liver count and mine was pretty good.

30. The Haematology Department at Guildford have been brilliant. I must admit, because I was told that the infection had cleared, I have been a bit lazy and have not gone for a check-up in about a year.

31. I do not have any tattoos or piercings, nor have I ever used any intravenous drugs.

32. The only other time I have been injured was when I had my jaw broken, but I did not receive any blood transfusions for that. I also had a knee replacement around 15 years ago.

33. It is because of this that I know the only way I could have contracted Hepatitis C would have been through the blood transfusion I received after my motorbike accident at St Peters Hospital Chertsey.

34. I was not given any information or advice about the risk of contracting any infections at the time of my blood transfusion because I was unconscious when it was given.

Section 3. Other Infections

35. As far as I am aware, I did not receive any other infection besides Hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

36. I do not believe that I was ever treated or tested without my consent, without being given adequate or full information, or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

Physical and mental impact of hepatitis C

37. As I mentioned previously, I did not have any major symptoms in the early years following the transfusion that would have alerted me to the infection. There was nothing significant that springs to mind, and that would have flagged up that I should go to the doctor to get checked out.

38. The main symptom I had was that I started to have regular colds. I was still working away and didn't feel a lack of energy or anything like that.

39. I also experienced depression, which I believe was a side-effect of the infection. I started taking anti-depressants, but when I started taking the Ribavirin I stopped the anti-depressants as I felt that I was taking too many pills.

40. I still suffer from regular colds now, however not as much as I used to. I have found that after having Hepatitis C I catch colds very easily.

41. I also now have very bad teeth, and over the years they have kept falling out, whereas before I had Hepatitis C I had good teeth. The lady who treated me at Guildford told me that this was one of the side-effects of the virus.

Physical and mental impact of the treatment

42. Before I started the treatment, one of the nurses at Guildford Hospital listed all of the side-effects that I would possibly have. She told me that I would be feeling very lethargic, depressed and have mood swings.
43. I would say that the side-effects of the Hep C treatment hit me straight away.
44. I administered the first Interferon injection to myself at home using an epi-pen like device. I would inject the Interferon into my thigh every Monday. I felt horrendous after the first injection.
45. After I would inject myself with the Interferon, I would feel walloped for the next couple of days. I would feel like I couldn't do anything.
46. The effects of the injection would ease off a little while after I had administered it to myself, but the effects of the Ribavirin tablets were constant. I carried on feeling tired and unwell long after taking the tablets.
47. I dreaded taking the tablets. The taste was disgusting, I could taste them before I even had them. The effect of the tablets was that I just wanted to go to sleep all the time, I couldn't do anything.
48. Some of the general side-effects of the treatment were; I experienced massive depression, mood swings and my teeth were falling out everywhere. I was not the person I used to be, that person was non-existent.
49. I had my young daughter that I was bringing up and looking after, since my wife passed away, but she had to look after me. I'm self-employed as well, so everything went, I lost everything, my work went, I was so tired and I just couldn't walk. I wouldn't put how I felt on my worst enemy.

50. The side-effects of the treatment I have mentioned above have carried on throughout my life. With the mood swings, I am still always very up and down. Although I went back to normal after a while, I will still occasionally get down in the dumps and this will escalate and I will get into a rut. That just wasn't me before.
51. The girl I was seeing at the time of my treatment suggested that I take anti-depressants. I did so, and they made me feel better, however after a while I stopped taking them as I thought I was taking too many pills.
52. Some people look horrendous when they are having the treatment. The lady at Guildford Hospital was gobsmacked that I looked so good. I felt horrendous, but I still had a tan. She told me that I looked alright.
53. The medication did start to have an effect quite quickly. My non-existent white blood cells, which the doctors were very concerned about, picked up shortly after I started the treatment.

Stigma

54. I was quite open about having contracted Hepatitis C. All of my friends know about it, and they knew about it at the time that I was having treatment. They were quite supportive and there was not really any stigma attached to having the infection.

Financial impacts

55. Being diagnosed with Hepatitis C had a massive impact on me financially. I have always worked as a self-employed decorator. I lost a lot of business after my diagnosis and throughout my treatment, because of the side-effects I was experiencing.
56. As I was not going out and socialising, for example going to the pub, while I was having my treatment, I was out of the circle and was not able to pick up any work for a considerable period of time.

57. I was out of work for around a total of 15-18 months from when I started my treatment, and when I got my feet back on the ground and had recovered, it took me around 3-6 months to pick up some decent work again.

58. I didn't even think about going on benefits at all. It didn't even cross my mind. I had some savings behind me and that all disappeared as I was surviving on it. My parents also helped me out.

59. It financially crippled me in the end. I should have gone for some help, but that's that, isn't it.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

60. I did initially face difficulties and obstacles in receiving treatment. When I was initially diagnosed by the Consultant at Barnstable Hospital, I was not given any treatment. As I mentioned before, I felt as though the Consultant didn't want to know and didn't care.

61. I never requested any particular kind of treatment as I wasn't advised about what might have been available.

62. Counselling and psychological support was not made available to me at any time as a consequence of being infected with Hepatitis C. Counselling was only suggested by the Guildford hospital at the start of my Hep C treatment i.e approximately 25 years after being given infected blood.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

63. I have never applied to any of the trusts or funds for financial assistance. I wasn't aware of anything that may have been available.

64. About 3 years ago, I went down to the local solicitors with my parents because I heard something in the news about people claiming damages or compensation for blood infection and medical records that had vanished.

65. The solicitors said that they could not find any relevant information and that I had no chance of getting anything, so I should not apply for anything.

66. This really put me off making any sort of application for financial assistance. I can't remember the name of the solicitors.

Section 8. Other Issues

67. The only additional comment I would like to make is that I would like to know the name of that Consultant in Devon who gave me complete and utter bad advice regarding the Hepatitis C infection.

68. He gave me the wrong information and I was going around without a care in the world, when in reality I was dying, and I was out there giving blood to people believing I was doing a good thing for others and that remains traumatic to me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 8th November 2019