

Witness Name: Christopher Reeve

Statement No.: WITN3147001

Exhibits: None

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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER REEVE

I, Christopher Reeve will say as follows: -

Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is Christopher Leslie Reeve. My date of birth is GRO-C 1970, and I live at GRO-C Kent, GRO-C. I am married to Karen, a chef. We do not have any children. I work as a self-employed handyman doing jobs such as building and painting.
2. As a result of treatment I received with infected blood product for my haemophilia, I was infected with Hepatitis C. I intend to talk about the impact and effect of this condition upon my life and the impact of the treatment I received.

Section 2: How Affected

Diagnosis and treatment with for haemophilia

3. I was diagnosed with haemophilia when I was around two years old in 1972. At the time I lived in GRO-C, and I believe I had an accident at home where my mother accidentally knocked me. This caused unusual bruising and so I was taken to GRO-C Hospital, where I was diagnosed with moderate to severe haemophilia type 3. I do not know how much information my parents received about this condition

at the time, and my parents have not told me much. I know that my mother and my stepfather had to look out for me more as I got older, as we appreciated that I was at a greater risk of harm than other children my age.

4. I believe that both my brother and sister were tested at the time and fortunately, my GRO-C. I do know that my mother's brother was a haemophiliac, and that he had a tonsil operation when he was very young and unfortunately bled to death as they lacked effective treatment at the time. I assume that my grandmother must have been a carrier of the condition.
5. I began treatment with Factor VIII blood product very soon after I was diagnosed, but fortunately it was only necessary when I was injured. I often went for long periods without such injuries and so my treatment was infrequent. When I was young I used to bounce back quickly from injuries, although as I get older this recovery is slowing down.
6. I used to periodically have to go into Margate Hospital ("Margate") for treatment, although, as I mentioned, this was very infrequent. I feel that at the time the medical professionals treating me did not know much about haemophilia or its treatment, and they simply administered the blood product without knowing much more than the basics.
7. I always used to receive my Factor VIII treatment at hospital and as far as I am aware never suffered from any side effects. This carried on for some time and it was quite easy treating my haemophilia when I was young.
8. I did not really feel any side effects from my haemophilia or its treatment at the time apart from the fact that I was often tired. I did not have to go to hospital more than once or twice a year. I was never allowed to play sports and always had to sit and watch because of the risk of getting hurt. My education was generally

unaffected, and I would say that my haemophilia had no significant impact upon my life when I was young.

Hepatitis C

9. My treatment continued unchanged until the mid-1980's, when I was around 16 years old. At one of my regular review appointments at Margate, Dr GRO-D informed me that some of the blood product I had been treated with had been contaminated, and that I had been infected with Hepatitis C as a result. The way in which I was told this was rather blasé, and I was not given any further information about the implications or treatment of this infection. I had no idea it was something serious as it was presented to me in such a casual way.
10. During the same period, there was a great deal of stigma and a lot of scaremongering about AIDS in the media, and we knew it was affecting haemophiliacs in particular. I can remember thinking, "*Oh my god, am I going to get this?*" I knew that I had been in receipt of American blood products, although I was never really told about the risks posed by it.
11. My mother, who worked for Pfizer's at the time, immediately went to the solicitors when she found out that I had been infected. She wanted to complain about my receipt of infected blood product, and wanted more information about possible legal action she could take. She was essentially told that we did not have "*a cat in hell's chance of going up against the government and winning*".
12. As a result of my infection with Hepatitis C, I constantly felt more tired and always wanted to go and sleep. I was regularly given liver function tests but the results for these were normal, and they simply kept monitoring me.
13. I began working for a gym as a maintenance man when I was around 21 years old. I was responsible for the maintenance of the building and exercise machines. I did not let the tiredness affect my life too much and I just tried to push through

on a day-by-day basis. I worked at the gym for around 11 years, from 1991 into the early 2000's. In the interim, I met Karen, my now wife, and we got married on [GRO-C], and moved from [GRO-C] to [GRO-C].

14. I did not tell my employers at the gym about my infection with Hepatitis C. They knew about the haemophilia but I felt that, at the time, that I had to be careful about who I disclosed my infection to because people used to get the wrong idea and think that I had contracted this infection because of a particular lifestyle or that it was connected to AIDS.
15. Around the early 2000's, I moved from working at the gym to working in a care home. This job required me to get Hepatitis B inoculations before I could work there, which I had previously had.

Treatment

16. I did not begin treatment for Hepatitis C immediately, as Dr [GRO-D] told me that the available treatment was very unpleasant, and that I should be patient and something better would come along. I continued my regular reviews at Margate. My wife can remember going into hospital with me on one such occasion, and believes I was told that a new treatment for Hepatitis C was coming in around 2001, however my treatment did not begin until around 2004. I cannot remember clearly why there was a delay. My treatment was managed at Canterbury Hospital ("Canterbury") rather than Margate and my regular reviews were managed at Canterbury too. Dr [GRO-D] showed me how to self-administer the treatment of Interferon and Ribavirin, which was made up of injections and tablets.
17. I can recall being given a booklet that mentioned potential side effects of the treatment for Hepatitis C which scared the life out of me. I recall one line that said something along the lines of, if you feel suicidal as a result of your treatment you need to stop taking it. I felt like the general attitude from the doctors was that I simply had to get on with it.

18. This treatment was very tough. I can remember that when I had the first injection I could not stop shaking. It was like putting ice straight into my veins and I was shaking, and continued shaking for about an hour. I was sat next to an open fire but I just could not get warm. This did not continue after later injections though, just the first one. After the later treatments I would feel like I had bad flu for a few days, and terrible headaches. I can recall having to take huge amounts of Paracetamol to treat the pain. It drained all of my energy and strength.
19. During my treatment, I continued working and only took three weeks off. While I did not tell many people at work that I was having this treatment, I think that I must have told my manager as he needed to know in case anything happened.
20. After six months, Dr GRO-D stopped my treatment and told me this was enough to deal with the severity of my infection. I was told that the news was good and that I had cleared the infection in early 2005. Despite this I continued to feel horrible side effects for a whole year after the treatment had stopped. I also suffered swollen joints as well as incredible tiredness. In addition to the physical side effects, I also had depression throughout this period.
21. The tiredness eventually began to affect me so much that I had to change my shifts and go down to working three days a week, as five days was simply too much for me. In 2006 I went to work with a firm of builders. My side effects began to improve at around this time, and I began feeling more like myself again.
22. In 2007 I became self-employed, running my own building company. As a self-employed builder I am able to manage how I use my time and energy. Big jobs can be challenging as I work on my own and so I have to be quite selective in what tasks I take on. I know that I cannot do now what I could do when I was 30 years old, such as renovating my own home on my own, which I did at that age.

23. Since 2006, I have had no real health concerns and I feel a lot better. I do recall an incident more recently where I picked up a virus and I felt so tired that I worried that the infection had returned, but fortunately it was just a normal illness and I cleared it quickly.
24. After clearing Hepatitis C, my haemophilia treatment has been changed from Factor VIII to a synthetic Recombinant blood product. I am not sure when this specifically began. Since 2006 I have only had occasional injuries requiring injections of blood product, which I continued to receive at Canterbury.
25. I started home treatment with blood products earlier this year, in 2019, and this continues without difficulty. I recognise that, in this way, I am fortunate and I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones as far as how the contaminated blood has affected me.

Section 3: Other infections

26. To my knowledge, I have not had any other infections as a result of being treated with contaminated blood.

Section 4: Consent

27. I am not aware of having been treated or tested for any condition without my full knowledge or consent.

Section 5: Impact

Impact of Hepatitis C and treatment

28. I have always felt quite angry about having been infected as a result of being treated with contaminated blood products. I do not feel I can go around telling people what has happened to me and I constantly feel on guard. There is still a

lot of stigma around these infections, and people think that Hepatitis C is the same thing as AIDS. This has generally made me quite anxious.

29. I did not realise how much the Hepatitis C itself had affected me until the treatment started. I never thought about it, and the doctors had downplayed it so much when I was first told, that I did not think it was a big deal. It was not until the treatment started that I realised that this was a serious condition. Despite the way that they acted like the infection was not a big deal, I do know that the doctors cared and that they fought for me to have this treatment.
30. After my treatment and its effects were over, I just wanted draw a line under it all and try to carry on my life as normal.

Impact on my wife

31. I know that, for my wife, the treatment was scary. She is a chef, so tried hard to find food that I would enjoy during my treatment, but she recalls that my taste buds went and my preferences changed, and so cooking for me became very difficult. I could not drink caffeine, and I remember going off stilton in particular.
32. I used to be energetic and lively, but during my treatment I was so tired. My wife would come home after a long day at work and then she would have to look after me. This would have been a lot for her.

Stigma

33. As I have described above, the fear of stigma around these infections was very present and real at the time. Looking back though, I can see it was more about my perception of how I would be treated, rather than what I experienced. I fortunately did not encounter any direct incident of stigma. However, I always felt that people simply would not understand what my infection meant and the cause of it, and that I would have to explain both Hepatitis C and haemophilia to everyone. People I used to work with when I was very ill still do not realise to this

day what I was going through, and in this way many people are absolutely clueless.

34. I never really wanted to have children, but now that I think about it, this might be because I did not want to pass on haemophilia to any child. Having gone through what I have gone through, I do not want to inflict that on an innocent child. I have never made these thoughts plain to people before as I simply do not think I have ever been asked.

Section 6: Treatment, care and support

35. Aside from the delay in receiving Hepatitis C treatment, which I understood, I have never had any major difficulties in obtaining treatment.
36. It can be hard to find a dentist who will take me on as a haemophiliac. I used to go to the healthcare centre at Canterbury Hospital for dentistry, and got my haemophilia injections while I was there. I had to be given Factor VIII immediately before having any dental treatment in order to stem the blood flow. It has never been too difficult getting these dentist's appointments, although I have had to ring up to organise my appointments every time as they will not send me reminders for regular check-ups. I used to be able to get all of this done in the hospital but now it is down to me to organise, although this is not particularly difficult. I have noticed that it is difficult to consistently get the same dentist to treat me.
37. I was never offered counselling in respect of Hepatitis C or treatment for this until I actively asked for it. This would have been after I began my treatment and when I was suffering from side effects in around 2005. I can recall asking a haemophilia nurse at Canterbury Hospital about receiving counselling. When I was eventually able to get an appointment, the counsellor went on and on about my father, and I remember thinking, "*I am not here for any sort of Freudian issue, I'm here about*

my Hepatitis C treatment". It did not do me any good at all and it put me off obtaining counselling in the future.

38. The hospital did offer group counselling sessions later on, but my earlier experiences had been so unpleasant that I did not take up the offer.

Section 7: Financial assistance

39. I was told about the existence of the Skipton Fund during my time being treated at Canterbury Hospital. We had to apply for it, although the application process was pretty straightforward, and as a result we received an ex gratia payment in around 2005 in the amount of £20,000.
40. We have also received payments from EIBSS. The form for this was a lot harder to fill in. I have dyslexia and I can remember saying to a nurse that the forms were so complicated that it felt like we were being set up to fail, to which they agreed.
41. I did speak to The Haemophilia Society about this and they told us to be patient with the forms and keep going. Eventually we found a website that would help us apply, however it still took me, my wife and my parents-in-law to sit down together to get through the forms. My wife can recall that each section had to be done in draft and then written out again into the actual forms to make sure that we gave them everything that they were asking for. This process was tough and took several hours. We had to submit a lot of information about my earnings at the time also.
42. Despite the difficulties of this application process, it did work out and our patience paid off. We have received monthly payments of £350 from 2017, and this recently shot up to £1,537 per month from April 2019. We also receive a one-off allowance at the end of the year for bills and amenities. This money has been an absolute godsend and has taken the pressure off me. I used to worry an awful lot

about my wife, as my position being self-employed, and my ability to take on large jobs is precarious. I am always worrying about where the next job is coming in from and where the next payment is going to go, and so these EIBSS payments have taken a huge weight off my shoulders.

Section 8: Other issues

43. My hopes for this inquiry are that someone is held to account for what happened. I know that this is probably going to be very hard, as half of those responsible are probably already dead, but I want to know who approved the use of these blood products, and who gave the go ahead for using these injections. Everyone at the time knew what was going on and it was plain as the nose on your face that the medication was infected. I feel like those responsible might as well have put a gun to people's heads and just blown them away. Other countries affected have held people to account and I feel like we are a joke for having not done so. It feels like we are still on the side-lines, waiting for justice.
44. Ideally I would like closure, accountability and proper compensation for everyone involved. I do not count on anything until it has happened, so I am not holding out hope. As I have said, the EIBSS payments have taken a great weight off my mind, especially as it is becoming increasingly hard to keep going to my job, but I do not know how long the payments will last, and I do not know how long I can keep working this way either.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 7.3.2020