

Witness Name: Janet Lawson

Statement No.: WITN3524001

Exhibits: WITN3524002

Dated: 12/09/2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JANET LAWSON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5 September 2019.

I, Janet Lawson, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Janet Lawson. My date of birth is GRO-C 1953 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am the eldest of three girls. I have three children and four grandkids.
2. I intend to speak about my father's infection with Hepatitis B through a blood transfusion and his subsequent death within GRO-C months of receiving this transfusion. In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, and the impact his illness and death had on our lives.
3. The process of anonymity has been explained to me, and I have chosen not to seek anonymity

Section 2. How Infected

4. I had a brilliant relationship with my father, Eric Fletcher, and we had a good laugh together. When he used to fall asleep I would put rollers in his hair a draw faces on his head in lipstick. We had a good chuckle.
5. Both of my sisters have provided statements to the Inquiry (WITN3682001 & WITN3681001). Please refer to their statements for further details relating to how my father was infected and the events leading up to his death.
6. I would like to add that when dad had his heart operation at Shotley Bridge Hospital on 24 February 1976, the doctors were brilliant. They knew what they were doing and gave us lots of information about what was being done. No one specifically told us that dad had a blood transfusion, but I clearly remember seeing one red bag and one clear bag right next to his bed.
7. I don't remember much about when my dad had to be rushed back from the caravan site that Easter weekend in 1976, following the heart surgery and blood transfusion. All I know is that when mam got dad home, she called the doctor but he refused to come. I know that dad was eventually taken to the Friarage Hospital.
8. All I remember is going into the room and seeing him lying there. I think it was between GRO-C between him being taken into Friarage and when he passed away. During this time, I do not remember the nurses telling us anything about his condition. He was very yellow and his stomach was very distended. He had the saline drip, and his arms were black and blue from where they took blood so often – everyday I think. I always remember a slice of toast that he could not eat being by the side of his bed. He just seemed to go downhill very quickly.

9. I do not think that my dad's death was handled very well at Friarage Hospital because we were not told about the Hepatitis B until the very last minute, and nothing was done for him – they just said that was that. I think we should have been told more about the procedures for helping us to deal with his death and given more information about the infection.
10. On dad's death certificate it shows the cause of his death as 1(a) Hepatitis B and II Congestive cardiac failure mitral valve disease. I have provided a copy of dad's death certificate to the inquiry and it is my exhibit WITN3524002.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. I do not believe that my father contracted any other infection, aside from Hepatitis B, from the blood transfusion he received.

Section 4. Consent

12. I do not add any more than my sister has said really, I think he had blood taken but was not given results at the time. Please refer to my sister's statement (WITN3682001).

Section 5. Impact

13. When dad was in Friarage Hospital he was constantly having bloods taken and he was put into a side room straight away. He had a drip pumping clear fluids into his arm the whole time because he could not drink anything or sit up. He constantly felt sick and wanted to throw up all the time.
14. His arms were black and blue from them taking so much blood everyday. They had to shave him in places because his arms were so hairy they couldn't find the vein sometimes! He was still talking all the

time that he was in Friarage Hospital, right up until the end. He never really talked about how he was feeling because he didn't really like to show weakness. However he did get quite teary a lot of the time, which was quite out of character for him. It was hard to see.

15. I never really saw him being attended to by doctors, only nurses. However, I seem to remember that it was mostly during the night that the doctors appeared. Visitors were only allowed in his room during the night and children were not allowed in at all, so Gail and I used to walk our sons down to visit him. We would hold the kids up to the window so dad could see them. I remember dad asking to see my son, Mark, near the end, so I went to get Mark and held him up against this big glass window so that he could see his grandpa.

16. When my dad was taken to Friarage Hospital he went straight into a side room. All the doctors said was, that dad was very poorly and that he had been taken into a side room. In hindsight, it could be that it was because they knew he had Hepatitis and they wanted to keep him separated, but at the time there was nothing to make me think this.

17. However, I am sure that the nurses had masks and gloves on when they came to treat dad. They also would not let us take the kids in to see dad, which is why we used to hold them up to the glass at the door. To do this, we had to take the kids through the main ward to get to the door anyway, so it is possible that he had been put in isolation. My perception of all this is that I remember my grandparents being put in a side room at the point the doctors thought they were about to pass away. The fact that dad was put straight into a side room could suggest that maybe the doctors knew what was going to happen - that he was going to die.

18. On the day he died, GRO-C 1976, I went to see him. Earlier that day he had been talking very slowly and seemed very tired. I remember him

making some awful noises and I told Ann as much when I was leaving. After that, I left the ward to go and tend to the children. I don't remember much about the injection he was given, but I think they just gave him something to make him more comfortable.

19. I found out that my dad had passed away when my mother called me just after 8pm. I had left the hospital at around 7.30pm and gone home, and I think that I had just got into the house when the phone rang. Mum told me not to come back to the hospital because she didn't like the fact that us girls got so upset – she was a little hard and didn't like to show too many emotions. After dad's death mum became very bitter.

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20. After dad died, there was a lot of hardship. Gail and I would sometimes cook meals for Ann and mam, because losing dad's wage really put a lot of pressure on Ann, who was not earning very much. Eventually, mam and Ann just wanted to leave the house and move away to get away from the house and the memories. Ann managed to find a house exchange in GRO-C, which is where I was living at the time. She managed to get a job in a newsagent, so she wasn't earning a great wage.

21. There was a huge financial impact on Ann because mum didn't work for quite a while. Mam eventually got a job when she got over things, but I think that she may have been made redundant at one point. Later on, mam started working in a supermarket.

22. My dad lost out on so many years; he might have lived until his 80s, but this was cut short because of the Hepatitis B. He had two grandsons he left behind when he died, and all the grandchildren have missed out completely. The year I had my eldest daughter, all I wanted

to do was show dad my little girl, but I couldn't. My daughters and grandkids have really missed out on knowing him.

23. After dad passed, I don't think I was depressed but I definitely felt down and deflated because of how quickly it all happened. I would pick up ailments more easily because I was rundown. I was constantly daydreaming about how things would have been if he had survived. Even now, 40 odd years later, I still wonder how things would have been if he were still around. Family milestones like birthdays, weddings or the birth of grandkids triggers these thoughts – we just want him here with us and can't help but think of how unfair it is that he isn't. He should not have been taken from us like this.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

24. No treatment was offered when my dad was diagnosed with Hepatitis B, because the doctor just said there was nothing they could do.

25. I was never offered counselling or psychological support, and I never went to the doctor about depression or anything like that. It was a different time back then and you didn't talk about those things, you just got on with it.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

26. We were never offered or told about any financial support or assistance.

27. As my younger sister has said in her statement (WITN3681001) we wanted mam to do something or look into why it had happened, but she refused.

Section 8. Other Issues

28. Ann came to me after seeing the Infected Blood Inquiry on the TV. At around the same time my son had also seen something about the Inquiry on the Internet and sent me the link. All of our kids know what happened to grandpa, and we have always been really open about telling anyone who asked about him. Therefore when Ann and my son came to me, they said that we needed to do something about this and tell the Inquiry about grandpa.

29. I have not spoken with a solicitor about this matter up to this time. Neither of us sisters have taken part in any campaigning.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

12-9-19.