

Witness Name: James Stirling

Statement No.: WITN4531001

Exhibits:

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JAMES STIRLING

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 28 September 2020.

I, James Stirling, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is James Stirling. My date of birth is GRO-C 1951 and I currently live in Glasgow. I am a widower with a 32 year old son, James George Stirling and I also have a 43 year old daughter from my first marriage but we are estranged. I used to work as a postman for Royal Mail but now I am retired.
2. I intend to speak about my Hepatitis C ("HCV") infection, which I contracted from my now deceased wife, Jane Mackallroy Bennet. In particular, the nature of our illnesses, how the illness affected us, the treatment received and the impact it had on our lives.

Section 2. How Infected

3. I met my wife, Jane in 1985 and for our first date, I took her to my brother's wedding. We got married in 1990, and our son James was about two or three years old at the time.
4. Jane was diagnosed with Rheumatoid arthritis and Lupus. This meant that her blood cells were very weak and she had to have regular blood transfusions at The Royal Infirmary and later the Gartnavel hospital in Glasgow. She was also given injections of gold at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary.
5. Our GP, Dr Mandeville was a Rheumatoid arthritis specialist, so he went above and beyond for Jane's care. She had knee, elbow and shoulder replacement surgeries and was kept for one or two nights at Gartnavel hospital. I cannot remember exactly when this happened but I know it was not long after James was born. We were not given any warning about the possibility of the blood being contaminated.
6. I believe that Jane had HCV for many years before she was informed of her diagnosis. I can't remember how or when because my memory is not what it used to be, but after she was informed she told me to go and get tested for HCV.
7. By around 2005, we noticed that Jane's symptoms were gradually getting worse. She was very thin and the doctors were giving her a protein drink along with other medications. She seemed to be on a lot of medication but I don't know if she was on any medication for HCV specifically.

8. I used to take her to Gartnavel hospital regularly to see Dr Hunter, Dr Porter and Dr Fox who worked in the infectious diseases department. They said that they were treating her for kidney and liver problems.
9. I was working as a postman for the Royal Mail at the time, driving a delivery truck. The job allowed me the flexibility to take care of Jane and to take her to doctor's appointments during the day, and work during the night. Jane had given up working as a seamstress a few years back due to her rheumatoid arthritis. On the days I was working a night shift, James would take over looking after Jane at night.
10. After I tested positive for HCV, the doctors told me that I would need to get a biopsy to see how far it had progressed. I had to refuse to have the biopsy at the time because they told me I would need to stay at the hospital overnight or longer which meant that I would have to leave Jane on her own. They also offered me medication but they said that it would make me drowsy which would have affected my driving for work so I declined that. They did not try to persuade me to have any further treatment aside from that.
11. We were led to believe that HCV was a very infectious disease and that if anyone touched our cup or used our towel, they could contract HCV. James was a teenager at the time so we did not inform him of our diagnosis. Instead, my wife and I tried to force him out of the house for his protection which ended up causing a rift between my son and me. It is only in the last 2 years since I have told my son the whole story that our relationship has started to be repaired.
12. After being ill for a long time, Jane passed away in 2012 as a result of pneumonia of her lungs.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. As far as I know, Jane and I did not receive any other infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

14. Jane was very open to a lot of treatment plans and was willing to let the doctors try experimental medication. She would even let the medical students come in to observe her because she was happy to help educate the kids. I know she consented to having some experimental medication but I don't know if this was HCV treatment specifically.

Section 5. Impact

15. HCV had a massive impact on our lives together. Jane and I made a pact not to tell anyone about our HCV diagnosis including James, so it affected our relationship with him. We even kept it a secret from Jane's younger sister Francis even though they were very close and used to talk on the phone constantly. Even up till now, many friends and family members do not know.
16. It affected our social life because we stopped going out entirely. I would stay in on the weekends at home with Jane after working all week. We could not have friends or family around either. We could no longer have our niece, Francis's daughter. From around age 16 onwards James could no longer have school friends over and he could not understand why.
17. Jane was very sick so James and I became full-time carers as well, taking shifts when the other was not around. I would be around during

the day while James was at school and James would be around at night when I went to work. Even after James went to university he wanted to quit to help take care of Jane but she would not allow it.

18. Towards the latter stage of Jane's illness, she was largely confined to the house and even before this she could no longer walk properly so she had to use a wheelchair to get around.

19. The doctors had not provided much information beyond the HCV diagnosis so we did not let people come close to us. We were of the belief that we could pass the disease on to anyone through even minimal contact.

20. At work, I could no longer mingle with people, so I used to sit alone or at a distance from people. For many years, I sat in my truck alone to take my 50 minute lunch breaks. I turned down invitations to social events or drinks. They must have thought I was silly, daft or mental.

21. I could not even hug my son and I am sure the lack of physical contact affected him. Things like family holidays were no longer possible.

22. Jane and I wanted to have many kids but it was not possible. We tried IVF twice. Jane's brother paid for one round of IVF and we paid for the second round. We had these at Nuffield Hospital. On the second round, one of Jane's eggs took but sadly it did not work. It broke Jane's heart because we wanted a big family but it wasn't to be.

23. I lost contact with my own family for a long time because I stayed away from social interactions, BBQs etc. I only told James I had HCV just before I got treatment for HCV in 2019, he was 31 years old at the time. I still cannot tell anybody else in the family. I worry that they will be angry that I kept it a secret for so long. After I was informed that I had cleared the virus in December 2019, I went on one holiday with my

brother and his family but even then I still had it at the back of mind not to hug my nieces and nephews.

24. Prior to this, I was a very outgoing and confident person but now I am the complete opposite. I gave up all my hobbies like football and fishing with friends. I don't drink a lot and I gave up smoking 20 years ago.

25. All I did was work and stay in 24/7. The reason I chose a night time job was so that I could take care of Jane during the day and even at night, I'd have to make sure there was food before I left and that she would be okay.

26. There were times that Jane would keep James away from school. In his third year of University, James was stressed out because things were escalating with Jane, she was feeling very poorly and started hiding away from the family. We would have to talk to her through closed doors. James' [GRO-C]

[GRO-C]

27. I can't remember much about Jane's symptoms but I remember that she suffered from depression as well as being physically weak. It was mentally draining for her to have to keep her diagnosis a secret. I don't know if the doctors were also treating her for the depression.

28. My symptoms were starting to become more prominent around this time too. I got brain fog which has lasted till this day. I get very forgetful, for example sometimes when I go from the kitchen to the living room I can't remember what I am looking for. I feel like I have to write things down before I go out to town to buy things because halfway through I will have forgotten what I am after. Sometimes people will wave at me from across the street and I will wave back but I cannot recognise them anymore. I was a jolly and happy go lucky person but now I tend to get angry a lot for no reason. I was brilliant at

arithmetic but now I cannot count. It stops me from doing a lot of things, I did not know that HCV did all these things.

29. Around 2011, I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes even though I eat very healthy and I have never been overweight. Even now my regular diet consists of vegetables, kale, spinach, moringa juice and protein powders. I am now losing the sight in one of my eyes because of the diabetes.

30. I have a lot of pain and aches in my neck, my leg and my arms which I still get. My teeth started shaking and falling out which was embarrassing at first. I now only have two original teeth left and have had to get dentures.

31. I cannot sleep at night, I take sulfadiazine at night to try and get some sleep, but many times I'm up at 3 or 4 am and cannot get back to sleep.

32. I have had muscle pain for about a year now since I got treatment for HCV. I have lost a lot of weight, I used to be about 11 stones and now I weigh under 9 stones. I exercise and try to walk 3 or 4 miles in the morning which helps to ease the pain.

33. About 14 years ago I think, I found out there were lumps in my prostate. I had to get a biopsy so my brother George took me down to the hospital. It turned out it was benign but I still had to have surgery to take them out. It affected having intimate relations with my wife sometimes.

34. I get skin rashes and blotches on my skin that my doctor diagnosed as dermatitis. There is still scarring on my legs because of this. I get psoriasis as well with red flaky skin on my head too. They gave me a shower gel and cream to help with the itchiness. I can't get to sleep

sometimes because I am clawing at it. I have sore ears and what looks like dry flaky skin. I wore long shorts so the kids wouldn't see them on holiday.

35. My life stopped being life after Jane passed away. When she was alive she knew I would stay in on the weekends after working all week, so she would run me a bath every Saturday and give me a little glass of whisky with my bath because we couldn't go out. She took care of me in that way even though I knew she must have been in pain.

36. Not long after Jane passed away, I was retired on clinical grounds. I was not thinking straight at the time due to grief from Jane's passing and the symptoms of HCV, though I did not know it at the time.

37. The disease stopped me and Jane from being ourselves. We were planning to move away from the city to the countryside and spend the rest of our lives there but we couldn't move.

38. At the time we purchased our house, we had only been able to get an interest-only mortgage because of my age. After losing my job, I was only on pension funds which meant that I could no longer afford to pay the mortgage because it was at such a high rate. We had never paid off the house and the lost income suddenly made it financially difficult to maintain the mortgage payments. I had to sell my car, as well as use all of my savings, my premium bonds and half of my pension to pay it off.

39. James also had to help me out by giving me money for food, even though [GRO-C] he was paying rent to live in a one bedroom house. Jane and I had believed that James could get infected through contact with us so I could not even let James back in the house and he did not understand why. James was in acting college at the time because while alive his mother had wished for him to pursue his creative dreams. He couldn't [GRO-C] and

he had to

GRO-C

GRO-C

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

40. Jane and I were never given any information or support necessary to deal with our diagnosis. I know that Jane might have been treated for HCV because she had to inject herself with one medication, it might have been Interferon, in her stomach. I know she had a bucket in the room to throw away the used needles.
41. I was never offered any treatment again for several years after my diagnosis until 2019, when I got a letter out of the blue, inviting me to come for a blood test and a scan. They told me that I had a 100% chance of clearing HCV with no side effects. I was given a 3 - 6 months' supply of the drug.
42. I now see a counsellor named Wendy Galbraith. She's a really nice person and I always feel better after our weekly sessions on Thursdays. Even when she is off she calls me about once a week to check in on me.
43. Before 6 or 8 months ago, no one offered me any support or counselling. The doctors did not give us any information or follow up with us after our diagnosis.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

44. I found out about the Scottish Infected Blood Scheme (SIBS) from the nurse who confirmed that I had been successfully cleared of HCV in December 2019.

45. James made the application on my behalf, which was rejected at first because they said that there was no record of me receiving a blood transfusion. They said that we would need to get supporting information from Dr Fox, who had been one of Jane's doctors.
46. The SIBS application process took a year and there were several delays. Dr Fox was away on holiday and the hospital took time to send things back. It was a very lonely process and it made me very angry.
47. I now receive monthly payments of £1600. I have received two payments so far already. I received a lump sum for myself and a further payment towards my wife's estate. Though we could have benefitted from this years ago while Jane was still alive.
48. The application process was very difficult. It was also stressful and re-traumatising because the SIBS were insensitive. They kept asking James questions that he could not answer such as "why didn't your mom do this or why did she not do that?", even though James had informed them that Jane had passed away nearly 8 years ago.

Section 8. Other Issues

49. We went to the hospital to ask for Jane's and my records but were told that these could not be found.
50. I would like an apology for my wife's death as a result of this illness due to the infected blood she was given. I hope that every unit of blood gets screened properly from now on so that this does not happen to anybody else.
51. I no longer trust doctors because they never told us that anything was wrong with the blood. I used to believe that if there was anything untoward happening the doctors would tell me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

2-11-20-20

