

Witness Name: William Stephen Hewitt

Statement No.: WITN4645001

Exhibits: **WITN4645002**

Dated: 17/12/2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WILLIAM STEPHEN HEWITT

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 November 2020.

I, William Stephen Hewitt, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is William Stephen Hewitt, known as Stephen. My date of birth is GRO-C 1963 and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I work for the local council as an empty homes officer, working with landlords of empty properties for their reallocation to social housing. I have a step-son from a long-term relationship, though his mother and I are separated. My father died on 16 May 2014 as a result of his infection with hepatitis C ('HCV'). My mother survives him, and I have a twin brother.
3. My mother received an introductory letter from the Inquiry addressed to my father on what would have been my father's birthday. She does not

wish to provide a statement as she is now very elderly it would be too distressing for her to recall these events.

4. I want to provide this statement on behalf of my family, including my mother and late father.
5. I intend to speak about my father's infection with HCV. In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment he received and the impact it had on him, my family and our lives together.
6. I should point out that I was only 11 years old when my father had the operation during which he was infected with HCV. I am therefore inhibited somewhat by my age in recalling the earlier stages of my father's illness.

Section 2. How Affected

7. My father, William Hewitt, was born on GRO-C 1936. He was a firefighter for Preston Borough, and later for the Lancashire Fire Brigade. Before becoming a fireman, my Dad served in the army. He was a big, strong man, both mentally and physically, with old fashioned values.
8. Around 1974, my father was injured in a fall whilst attending a fire. He was also injured in a minor motorcycle accident around this time. After another incident, when he was injured after slipping in the yard at Preston Fire Station, he had an operation in 1974 on his back to remove two slipped discs. It later became apparent to us from his medical records that my father was transfused 2 pints of blood during this operation.
9. After the back operation in 1974, my father was never quite the same again. He was off work for 12 months, after which he strived to return to operational duties. However, he soon realised this was no longer possible and he began working on fire prevention and desk duties. He

was easily and persistently fatigued, and was eventually forced to retire early in 1986 due to ill health.

10. My father's health deteriorated quite rapidly throughout the 1990s. I began to notice this as I grew older. It started off with minor things originally, but it carried on and gradually worsened. He struggled to get over even a minor cold. He went from being a healthy and strong man working as an operational firefighter to someone who became susceptible to any minor virus going around.
11. Everything about his demeanour changed, and tiredness became a big issue. He was continually tired and he suffered from memory loss. A pattern of ill health emerged, particularly during the 1990s.
12. In 2000, my father was due to have a hip operation. I do not recall the exact circumstances, but I know that in the build-up to this operation my father was diagnosed with HCV. It was only then that we, as a family, realised the cause of my father's declining health.
13. In the 26 intervening years between my father's back operation and his diagnosis with HCV, my mother informs me that my father remained a regular blood donor. It is horrendous to think that he may have been unwittingly responsible for infecting other people by trying to do the right thing to help others.
14. In the early 2000s, around 2004 or 2005, my father took part in a trial to treat his HCV infection. I do not remember the name of the drug used to treat him, I just remember that it made him much worse.
15. The trial medication, whilst under the care of the Preston Royal Infirmary, lasted for 4 or 5 months. My Dad would have the injection on a Monday, which made him very ill and bedbound until Friday. He felt a little better over the weekend but then had to have the injection again on the Monday, when the cycle started all over again.

16. It was horrendous to see him suffer, and we took the decision, with my Dad in full agreement, that he shouldn't carry on with it.
17. My father also had a liver biopsy that showed he had cirrhosis of the liver. It was described to us as like his liver was turning to 'mush', the result of so many years of living with HCV without knowing and unchecked.
18. After this initial trial medication, my father did not receive any further treatment for his HCV infection. His only treatment was in relation to his stomach that repeatedly swelled up with fluids. He had to go to hospital regularly to have this drained with a huge needle.
19. This treatment was undertaken on the liver ward, number 24, at the Preston Royal Infirmary. My Dad was the exception to the rule on this ward, as most people were there with alcohol-related illnesses. I can remember seeing them all and thinking 'you lot have a chance' by giving up alcohol, whereas my Dad was helpless.
20. My father's visits to the hospital became more and more regular. It felt like he was in and out almost every week. It was unbelievable how much fluid they had to drain from him. Despite this, he also lost a lot of weight. He went from being tall, broad-shouldered and 14½ stone down to around 7 stone by the end.
21. My father struggled with sleeping, and this was made even harder when he stayed in hospital. There was constant shouting amongst the inpatients and their visitors also. I recall on one occasion that he was threatened by another patient who wanted money to buy alcohol. This incident was eventually dealt with.
22. My Dad was a proud man, though by the end of his illness he had lost all of his dignity, which was the saddest thing. Two weeks before he died, he was allowed home for the weekend over the bank holiday. He was in a wheelchair by that stage, so my Mum and I took him up to Lytham and walked him around so he could get some fresh air in the countryside.

23. When we got home, we could both tell that he wasn't right. As soon as I got home I received a phone call from my Mum telling me that my Dad had defecated on the bedside table in the belief that it was a toilet. When we got him back to the hospital, the doctors explained that the HCV had poisoned his brain.

24. After this episode, we took advice and the decision that my father should be medicated and left to die in peace. He sadly died on 16 May 2014, aged 78. Thankfully he didn't suffer in the end. My father's cause of death was recorded as 'l(a) Hepatitis C Liver Cirrhosis'. I enclose a copy of my father's death certificate as exhibit **WITN4645002**.

Section 3. Other Infections

25. My father had no other infections as a result of receiving infected blood during his back operation in 1974.

Section 4. Consent

26. I am unable to comment on whether my father consented to being tested, or receiving treatment, for HCV. I have no knowledge about this.

Section 5. Impact

27. My Dad was one of four brothers who were all big, strong blokes. To see him by the end, when compared to how I knew him when I was a kid, was devastating for me. He was a skeleton by the end. My father's eldest brother died recently aged 91, and the other brothers are 89 and 84. It is therefore not unreasonable to say that my Dad died prematurely, aged 78. I wonder whether he would still be alive today if he was not infected with HCV. We, as a family, believe that his life was cut short by HCV.

28. In the latter stages of his life, my father confided in me that he was scared of dying. To hear this from your Dad is heart-breaking. It surprised me to hear this, having always known him as a strong and positive man. He didn't deserve that. I felt completely hopeless and unable to help him. There was nothing I could do to make him feel better.
29. Despite confiding in me about how he felt, my Dad never spoke about contaminated blood. He refused to speak to anyone about it, and the first I knew of it was after his diagnosis. Although I knew what hepatitis is, I was not aware of HCV specifically. My uncle had read up on it and this helped us become more understanding. I soon realised however that there was no cure. On reflection, I believe that my Dad would have worried every day about his illness getting worse. He was effectively given a death sentence.
30. My father was also emotionally affected by the prospect of not seeing his granddaughter grow up. She was only 4 when he died. It affected all of us how they both lost the opportunity to have this relationship. He would have loved to take her to the park or out for the day, but he just couldn't. It was so sad.
31. My Mum worked on reception at a printing press factory for over 30 years, yet it was only after my Dad died that my brother and I realised how strong she was. She did everything for my Dad throughout the entirety of his illness.
32. By the time of my father's diagnosis with HCV, my mother had retired. She was his full-time carer, staying up and looking after him every night. She took him to the bathroom, washed him, cleaned him and fed him.
33. All of this took its toll on my Mum. It had a huge effect on her as she did so much for him, especially in the last 4 or 5 years. Although I helped as much as I could, I had some respite from it by virtue of the fact that I did not live in the house. I could come in and out of the situation, whereas my Mum lived in it 24 hours a day. Living under this pressure and in that

34. It completely wore her out and she aged dramatically as a result. When you compare photographs from before and after my father's illness, my Mum is unrecognisable. It wasn't in her nature to confide in me as she didn't want to worry me or my brother. I had to pry things out of her.
35. When my father died, it almost felt like a relief. If my Dad hadn't died when he did, I don't know how much longer my Mum could have coped with it. We did have some support from NHS carers who visited the house towards the end of his life. They were lovely people but there was only so much they could do. Most of the burden fell on my Mum.
36. This sense of relief when he eventually died caused me to feel guilty. Though my twin brother helped when he could, I was only living around the corner so I was the first port of call whenever my Dad needed help. I witnessed the significant deterioration in his health, and it was very hard for me to process. I recall one incident when my Mum phoned me at work. My Dad was stuck in the bath, as the electrical support to hoist him out had stopped working. I left work straight away and went around to the house. I lifted him out of the bath and remember seeing how weak he had become. I could have physically lifted him up with one arm. There was no dignity in the end.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

37. To the best of my knowledge my father did not face any difficulties in obtaining treatment for illnesses not directly related to his HCV.
38. I have nothing but admiration for the NHS and the people who helped with my Dad. I do however recall one occasion where he was put in a room on his own, during a visit to hospital to drain his stomach. We had taken him to A&E where he was put on ward 20, the diagnostic ward, as opposed to the liver ward where he was normally treated. He started to

shake and was very cold. I asked one of the nurses to call a doctor and she said he would be in soon. The nurses were extremely busy, yet it took over 2 hours for someone to call a doctor to check on my father. When the doctor finally arrived, he identified that my father's kidneys were failing. After this we would dread having to go to hospital on a weekend as they were so busy and understaffed.

39. I recall one incident when my Dad was being drained of fluids. The doctor performing the draining pricked himself with the needle. When my Mum asked if he had read my father's medical notes, he said 'no'. She then told the doctor that my Dad had HCV. The doctor was horrified.

40. Dr Shields was the head of the liver and kidneys department responsible for my Dad's care at the Preston Royal Infirmary. He was a lovely man and fantastic throughout all of my father's illness. He was always honest and up front. Dr Shields' predictions all proved to be correct, and we trusted him entirely.

41. The staff and nurses on the liver ward 24 at Preston Royal Infirmary were all very good to my Dad. They helped him to sleep in his last two weeks through a morphine-based drug as opposed to him having to go into a hospice.

42. On the day my Dad died, one of the nurses phoned me to say we needed to go to the ward as he was close to death. I left work and headed straight to the hospital. Unfortunately and tragically I arrived just after he had passed away. I was devastated to think that he had died alone, however two of the nurses told me that they had sat with him and held his hands for the last hours of his life. I am eternally grateful to them for doing this.

43. The nurses and auxiliary nurses even attended his funeral. Up until this year's covid epidemic, my Mum would still attend the ward, popping in for a chat and taking them chocolates.

44. As far as I am aware, my father did not receive any offer of counselling or psychological support in consequence of his infection with HCV. I

have never heard it spoken about and I believe to be highly unlikely that any such service was offered to him or my mother.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

45. I am not sure how exactly my Dad found out about the Skipton Fund. It is possible that he was told by the medics or nurses at the hospital, or possibly having received something through the post. I am sure that he would never have pushed for it, he would have been informed by someone else.
46. Again I am not sure when exactly he applied to the Skipton Fund, though I believe that he received a stage 1 payment of £20,000. I believe that he also received in the region of £1000 every month. Since my father's death, I think that my Mum still receives a payment of around £70-80. The financial support she receives is confusing. My Mum received letters from the Caxton Trust and I did not understand why.
47. My Mum recalls that they received an additional payment from the Skipton Fund, though she is sure that the second payment did not amount to £50,000, which I understand to be the stage 2 payment from Skipton for cirrhosis of the liver. My mother remembers that when the letter came with the offer of a payment, they had to sign a form that stipulated they were not entitled to any further payments. Signing this form was a condition of receiving the payment from the Skipton Fund. My Mum cannot be specific about when this happened, though she remembers that Tony Blair was the Prime Minister at the time.
48. All my Dad ever wanted was for somebody to apologise to him. The money didn't matter to him. Despite all his best efforts, no one ever apologised to him. All they ever did was put obstacles in his way.
49. My parents found out about the Archer Inquiry after my cousin read an article in the paper regarding contaminated blood. After hearing about

this, I believe that my father wrote a letter to the Archer Inquiry detailing the events surrounding his infection with HCV. It is my understanding that his evidence was 'out of time' and so omitted from the Archer Inquiry's considerations.

50. My father requested his medical records from Lancashire Fire Brigade. They initially refused to give them to him. I am unsure how he went about this, though I know his good friend from the fire service, Paul, helped him in his endeavours. It was bizarre that they refused to give them to him. They said that he wasn't entitled to seeing his medical records because it broke some sort of rule or regulation.

51. My father pursued this fervently- he could be a belligerent bloke at times- and was adamant that he wouldn't be treated like that. This ended up in a court hearing that ruled that he should be granted access to his medical records. When he received his records, they were apparently a complete set and nothing obvious was missing. I question why they were so reluctant to release them to him.

52. Even now I have no idea why he was denied access to them. I am sure that at one stage they said his records had been destroyed, though my Dad didn't accept that and carried on fighting. Then once the court ruled in his favour, the medical records miraculously appeared.

Section 8. Other Issues

53. I am not doing this so someone gets nailed to the cross. I am doing it to ensure that nothing like this can never happen again. Nobody, no family, deserves to go through what my family and many others' have been through. Whatever the outcome of the Inquiry, if no one is to blame, that's fine with me. I just want to know that it cannot happen again.

54. Nothing can now can help my Dad or change what we as a family went through. All Dad wanted was for someone to acknowledge what

happened. Ultimately all he wanted was for someone to say sorry. Sadly, this never happened before his death.

55. I know that my Dad would be happy that I have provided this statement to the Inquiry on his behalf.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

17/12/2020

