

Witness Name: Lynda Wharton

Statement No.: WITN3915001

Dated: 24 June 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LYNDA MARIE WHARTON

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Lynda Wharton and my date of birth is GRO-C 1965. My address is known by the Inquiry.
2. I am writing this statement about my late brother Bryan Bartlett, born GRO-C GRO-C 1967, who contracted Hepatitis B from a blood transfusion. My mother Josette Bartlett has also provided a statement to the Inquiry (WITN3914001).

Section 2. How Affected

3. My brother Bryan had leukaemia. He was given a blood transfusion in 1986 to aid his recovery. Bryan's doctor informed us that he had contracted Hepatitis B (HBV) from the transfusion shortly afterward. Please see my mother's statement for more information about how Bryan was infected and diagnosed.
4. After his leukaemia treatment, Bryan went into remission. He was told the cancer could come back any time within 5 years, but if it hadn't by then it

likely wouldn't. His spirits were much better; he felt he had fought off the cancer and the worst was over.

5. When Bryan was diagnosed with HBV, however, he immediately began to deteriorate. I remember him coming to my house and making him a cup of tea, and he asked me if I was going to say sorry. I asked why, and he said "When people are dying, you're meant to say sorry". He said he knew the blood they gave him was bad, and he was going to die.
6. I didn't understand what hepatitis was at the time. There was no way to get information about it other than relying on what doctors told you, as there was no internet. If you had a doctor who was good and explained everything to you, you were lucky; if you had one who was dismissive, that's just the way it was. I am not sure exactly what Bryan's doctor told him, but he didn't seem to have much information about how the illness would progress. As a result, none of us had a clue. We just knew he had an infection of the blood, and didn't know what to expect.

Section 3. Other Infections

7. Bryan was infected with HBV only.

Section 4. Consent

8. I do not believe Bryan was given enough information to consent to receiving a blood transfusion, as he was not aware of the risks.

Section 5. Impact

9. Before Bryan contracted HBV, he had everything to live for. Even with the leukaemia he still ran a half marathon in the rain to raise money for charity. He just wanted to live. Once he got the hepatitis, he knew he couldn't survive them both. He told me that the doctors could not treat the hepatitis because he was too weak from the leukaemia, and they could not treat the

leukaemia because of the hepatitis. He was tired and knew he was in a lose lose situation.

10. Bryan died in October 1986, just weeks after he had been diagnosed with HBV.
11. Bryan was not able to receive treatment for the HBV because of his leukaemia. This was the main obstacle for him and prevented him from clearing both infections, even though he was otherwise young and recovering well from his illness.
12. Bryan was aware of the stigma against hepatitis even when he was acutely ill in hospital. He told me that the way hospital staff treated him was different before and after his diagnosis. He said that staff assumed he had contracted hepatitis sexually, and treated him as if he was dirty. My mother and I used to go to Hammersmith Hospital on a Friday afternoon to see Bryan, and I did notice that some of the nurses were a bit off with him and didn't seem sympathetic. At the time I assumed that they were just having a bad day or it was a one-off occurrence. I don't know if he was treated that way all the time, as I was only there on those few occasions, but I can understand that if all of the staff treated him that way that would have been difficult for him.
13. I still don't tell many people about what happened to Bryan. I have found that if I tell people that he got infected blood from the hospital, they don't seem to believe that that's why he couldn't get better. They say he couldn't have gotten hepatitis from blood. I find it easier not to explain it and to just say he died of leukaemia.
14. Bryan did not have much of a social life once he became ill. He used to say that he felt like a child because he was so ill and could not do any of the things his friends were doing, like working, having relationships, leaving home, and going out. He just had to stay at home with his mum like a small child.

15. When Bryan was diagnosed with HBV, and it became clear that this would prevent him from being treated successfully for the leukaemia, we knew that this meant that he was going to die. However, it was very hard for me to accept this. I kept saying to him that there was still hope, that the doctors were doing their best to help him and that doctors were always finding new treatments for things. I did this to encourage him to hang in case there were some new treatment he could take. In the end I knew he was going to die, I saw it, but I didn't want to believe it.
16. After Bryan passed, I felt very depressed. I was 21 at the time, divorced and had a 3 year old son. I really felt that God had taken the wrong child, and I wanted desperately to swap places with my brother. I felt that since I already had a child, there was a part of me walking around and my son would have gone to my mum if I had died, so she would still have a connection to me, but Bryan had no one to carry on his legacy. I felt guilty about this and at times turned to self-harm.
17. My son eventually took me to see the GP as I was really struggling, and they gave me a leaflet in the GP surgery about depression and the signs to look for. I remember realising that I had all of the 15 symptoms listed. It was a wake up call that I was in a real bad way.
18. I did see a counsellor once, but right away said that I didn't want to talk about my brother. The counsellor asked why not, what had happened to him, and I explained that he died. I remember she then asked "How did that make you feel?" It was such a generic question, I didn't know where to begin so I didn't continue to see her.
19. During Bryan's illness, my mother didn't have time to digest what was happening to him as she had so many responsibilities. She had my two younger sisters at home, was working, and was driving to Hammersmith to see Bryan every other day. I think she managed during that time by putting it to the back of her mind so she could cope with everything she had to do.

20. After he passed, she completely shut down. I lost her emotionally. She has been getting better recently, but for a long time she was completely unavailable to me emotionally.
21. Immediately after his death, she was in such shock that she could not speak for two days. By the early 1990s, she was in a bad state. I took my mum to the GP in 1992 to try to explain how difficult she was finding it. Unfortunately they didn't seem to take her seriously. It felt like they didn't know where to start, so they just dismissed it. I wish the doctors had been more understanding and listened to her instead of dismissing her as if they couldn't be bothered to help. I had to advocate for her and tell them that she was [GRO-C]
22. Eventually, she deteriorated further and was assessed as being a [GRO-C] [GRO-C] As she refused to go to hospital voluntarily, she was sectioned and sent to Saint Anne's Hospital on 22 October 1993. She was allowed home after 21 days but I'm not sure they ever addressed the underlying issues she was having.
23. During the time that my mother was having serious mental health problems, I felt I was left to support her on my own as I did not have help from my other siblings. The day that my mother was sectioned, one of my sisters was away for the weekend and the other had a young baby, so I had to manage it myself. My mum was in such a bad state, I was so scared for her. It weighs heavily on me that I had to do that. I feel guilty about having to section my own mother after she had to take care of Bryan and us all during his illness.
24. To this day I feel that Bryan's death ripped our family apart. My sister Angela, who was 12 at the time, [GRO-C] [GRO-C]. My sister Jo, who was 14, became a punk, started hanging out at Bournemouth pier late at night, [GRO-C] Both sisters started rebelling and had trouble at school.

25. My stepdad, who raised Bryan as his own, was deeply affected as well. He was devastated as people would often ask how my mum was coping, but they seemed to forget about him and never asked him how he was feeling. None of us were offered any help or counselling to cope with what had happened.
26. Bryan's illness and death has ripped our family apart. Before this, we were a very close family. We had been raised to look after our siblings and to be there for each other. But afterward, instead of standing together against the world, we were all grieving in our own way and ended up turning on each other because of it. It's still like that to this day. We have talked about Bryan of course, but never in depth about what happened and how it has affected us, so we are unable to be as close as we once were.
27. My mum and I did attend the psychosocial expert hearings at the Inquiry and found this really helpful in understanding why we were grieving the way we were and that this was normal. It helped bring us closer. I hope that my two sisters are able to learn more about this as well so they can come to terms with their grief and the family can start to mend.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

28. I feel Bryan should have been given more information about what hepatitis meant for him and why he couldn't receive treatment. Instead he was just given practical information about his immediate treatment needs – such as, "you're going to have radiation now" with no long term discussion of what would happen and why. At the time it was doctors were almost still treated like gods - you didn't dare go and push for more information or ask questions.
29. No counselling or psychological support was offered to any of us.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

30. No financial assistance was made available to any of us.

Section 8. Other Issues

31. I do not want something like this to ever happen again. For me personally, the Inquiry has really helped me come to terms with what happened. I am eternally grateful for it. However, I want to ensure that this never happens again, as the effect on our family has been devastating.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 25/6/2021