

Witness Name: Eric Reeve

Statement No.: WITN6617001

Exhibits: N/A

Dated: 18/12/2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ERIC REEVE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 19 August 2021.

I, Eric Reeve, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Eric Reeve. I was born on GRO-C 1948 and reside in GRO-C. I served in the RAF and after leaving in 1971 held several jobs and retired after 18 years from the Civil Service in 2010. I live with my wife and we have two daughters. My eldest daughter is married with two children and my youngest daughter is single. I also have one older brother.
2. I intend to speak about my father's infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV"). In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected us, the treatment he received, and the impact it had on my father, my family, and our lives.

Section 3. How infected

3. On 12 December 1984, my father was wheeling his bike across a zebra crossing on Stockton Road, Hartlepool when a car hit him. My father was taken to Hartlepool General Hospital (now called The University Hospital of Hartlepool) where he was treated for a broken leg and other injuries including an injury to the back of his head.
4. My father had an operation on his broken leg in which they used a plate and screws. My father spent just under 10 days in the hospital but was back home recovering for Christmas 1984. I assume during the operation that my father was given blood; however, my father could not personally recall this.
5. After the operation my father received physiotherapy and was eventually encouraged to take short walks each day. It was when he was on one of these short walks near Easter 1985 that the plate buckled and he was taken back to the General Hospital in Hartlepool. The hospital replaced the plate with the use of a pin through the hip to support the break. I believe my father's infection could have happened from either of these operations. Both operations happened in the same hospital on the same orthopaedic ward.
6. My father was not unconscious whilst in hospital and gave his own consent for the operations. I imagine he was told about the risks of the operations, but I do not think that my father would have accepted the blood had he known that it might cause any type of infections.
7. In 1990 my father was not feeling very well. We know that my father had been seeing his own GP, and I assume they advised he undergo tests including blood tests. When the results returned he was referred to see a Specialist at Freeman Hospital Newcastle upon Tyne. Following a scan of my father's liver, he was told that he had HCV and that his life

expectancy would be 20 years. My father said that he possibly wouldn't be alive in 20 years' time but the Specialist told him it was 20 years from the time of infection, meaning 1984/1985 and that my father had already had about six years, so he effectively had 14 years possibly of life expectancy left.

8. My father asked how he had acquired the infection and the doctor told him "when you had your operations 1984/1985 you were given contaminated blood, but there's nothing you can do about it".
9. After my father's diagnosis, I received a message saying that I needed to go to my parent's house. My father then told me he was infected with HCV and how it had happened through being given infected blood during the operations he had after the accident in 1984/1985. My father also told me what the Specialist had said that there was nothing he could do about it. My brother at the time lived in GRO-C so my father told him the same information in a telephone conversation around the same time as he told me.
10. To the best of my knowledge I do not know if any information was provided to my father about the infection. As a family though we were not made aware of the risks of cross-contamination and blood-to-blood contact. This is information that we should have been told, given the seriousness of it.

Section 3. Other infections

11. To the best of my knowledge I do not believe that my father was infected with any other infections apart from HCV.

Section 4. Consent

12. To the best of my knowledge I do not believe that my father was treated or tested without his consent.

Section 5. Impact

13. My father was a clean living Christian, occasionally preaching and supporting my mother in her Christian work. He was a family man and had two brothers and three sisters. He loved his garden, sometimes providing vegetables and flowers to us. He loved woodwork and would make furniture. He also loved making clocks and also repairing clocks and watches as a hobby. Musically, my father could play the organ, violin, accordion, penny whistle and also he played a brass instrument when he was in the Salvation Army band. He left the Salvation Army in the early 1960's. My father cycled everywhere, exercised at home, and took vitamins. My father never smoked or drank, and alongside my mother, was always interested in Christian missionary work.
14. Work wise, my father served as an apprentice shipwright carpenter and after his apprenticeship worked at several local shipyards around Hartlepool and also had the privilege of working on HMS Ark Royal built in the early 1950's at Cammel Laird yard in Birkenhead. He then moved on to work for the dock railway engineers in Hartlepool. Following this, my father worked as a woodwork instructor at an Adult Training Centre also in Hartlepool and finally worked at the Hartlepool College of Further Education as a Technician in the building training centre from which he took early retirement after the accident.
15. After diagnosis, my father met a friend, and when asked how he was doing, my father's response was to say "I've just had a body blow" - referring to the fact he'd just been diagnosed with HCV and how he'd acquired it. He told this friend that he had been told there was nothing that he could do about it.

acquired it. He told this friend that he had been told there was nothing that he could do about it.

16. My father became very stressed about the HCV infection following diagnosis.
17. My father had regular blood tests following diagnosis, and his local GP surgery would arrange a driver each time to take my father and my mother for appointments when he had to go to the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. To the best of my knowledge my father went there regularly probably every three or six months.
18. My parents would always tell us everything was ok. In the later years of my father's life, my mother would often tell us that my father was "resting" this meant he was on the settee with his legs up. My parents were not people that went to bed during the day, and so if I went to visit and my father was in bed, I knew he was ill.
19. In the year that my father died, my brother and I knew he was not feeling well but we also knew that he was seeing his GP and making visits to the hospital both locally and also the Freeman Hospital.
20. Week commencing 21st September 1997, my brother came to stay with my parents and he took my parents to my father's hospital appointment at the General Hospital in Hartlepool on the following Tuesday morning (23rd). In the early hours of Thursday 25th September my father had a stroke. On GRO-C October, my father passed away. As a family, we believe the stress and anxiety from having HCV caused the stroke. We were surprised that HCV was not mentioned to the family and was not referred to by any member of the hospital staff whilst my father was in hospital and also it was not recorded on the death certificate.

21. I don't know why my father was going to the hospital. I presumed it was for further blood tests; however, I never questioned it. My parents were people who did not question what a Medical Professional said to them about their health as they believed implicitly what was said and would never have considered asking for a second opinion. My mother did say however that a week or so before my father had his stroke, he had told her that he felt as though his liver, or something, was pushing up into his stomach.
22. To the best of my knowledge I do not know if my father was told about any treatment to cure the HCV infection as it was not something he talked to us about. I cannot recall any intensive course of treatment that he was on because now knowing that the treatment would have been intense I believe we would have seen the effect it would have caused. When I cleared out all of my father's medications after he passed away, I did not find anything that related to him being treated for HCV. My father was not one to take pills that were not necessary, and my father never had to take tablets following his heart attack in 1987 but he did have tablets available should he have needed them and those were the only tablets I had to dispose of when he died. Had there been treatment available, to the best of my knowledge I do think my father would have accepted it and been given it.
23. The day after my father had passed away (10/10/1997) we had to go back to the hospital to get the death certificate. My mother insisted on seeing my father, although my brother and I did not want that to happen. When we went down to the mortuary, my father was laid out on top of a table, behind a glass panel. My mother wanted closer contact; however, we were told that because of my father's HCV infection, we were not allowed to touch him. This is the reason why we expected to actually see HCV on his death certificate. The undertaker also said that we could not touch the body, as the embalming process had brought the HCV onto the skin.

24. I went several times to the Funeral Home with my mother, and each time she was absolutely distraught that she could not touch my father. My brother did not even want to take my mother to the Funeral Home because he found it too distressing for my mother and himself.
25. When my father had his stroke on the 26th September 1997, there was no mention that we could not touch him whilst he was in hospital. Nor was there any mention of the risks of infection between my father having his operations in 1984/1985 of cross-contamination and blood-to-blood contact and up until the day he died.
26. To the best of my knowledge my father's infection did not impact family relations, especially as we were not that close to extended family. I do not know whether my father discussed his health with his sisters or his remaining brother. To the best of my knowledge I do not think they had knowledge of his HCV infection.
27. To the best of my knowledge my father did not experience any stigma associated with having HCV.
28. My father's HCV infection had a substantial impact on my mother and my parents' lives together. After my father's accident my parents no longer went on any holidays - I think my mother had a fear he might die when they were away. They did however still take the bus and go out on day trips together and they did manage to travel to Lincoln in a taxi for my brother's wedding in July 1996.
29. Later on the Thursday morning of my father having the stroke, something was said to my mother at the hospital and she whipped around very angrily at the hospital staff and exploded "it was you lot who gave my husband the contaminated blood". This was totally out of character for my mother, and I believe it was an indication of the amount of stress my

mother was under and the pent-up anger she had inside. During this time, my mother was also having blood pressure problems and kidney infections, which I now believe were also linked to the stress. My mother blamed those who gave my father the contaminated blood for his stroke and his subsequent death.

30. When my mother died in GRO-C 2006 in the latter year of her life my wife took her for a hospital check up and she was shocked at the condition of my mother's body, as well as the multiple hernias she had. We had asked her to go to the GP about the hernias because we knew she had them after her kidney operation in 1998 but my mother kept saying that the specialists who had carried out the operation to remove her kidney said he would send for her. On one occasion when I spoke to her about the hernias she snapped back at me and said that it was "her body". I realised that she was worried that she might need a blood transfusion during any treatment at Hartlepool General Hospital and that such blood might have been contaminated and result in her getting HCV.

31. After my father's death my mother suffered badly with grief and also continued to have kidney infections. Around May 1998 she was taken into The General Hospital at Hartlepool as an emergency with a severe kidney infection. After about 2 days the infection had got worse and she collapsed and they took her into the ICU where she was put into an induced coma. It was then they discovered she had a growth in one of her kidneys. She recovered and was discharged to a care home for recovery and rehabilitation and eventually returned to her own home. She still continued to grieve deeply for the loss of my father and was somewhat bitter towards the hospital for giving him contaminated blood.

32. Whilst still worried about contaminated blood and possibly HCV she needed to have the diseased kidney removed as to not have an operation it could be life threatening. After the operation in late 1998 to remove the diseased kidney she spent a short period of time in a care home recovering and then returned to her own home. But she continued

to have acute cystitis and over the intervening years was admitted to hospital when it was out of control of her normal antibiotic medication. From the Friday afternoon 6th October until Monday 9th October my wife and I cared for her as she was not well. Monday 9th October her GP arranged for her to be admitted to The General Hospital in Hartlepool. On the [GRO-C] the hospital advised that they had given her all the medication they could but gave no indication that she was dying. We as a family left her in their care after visiting hours (8.00pm). I received a phone call at around 8.30pm at home to say that my mother had passed away.

33. My mother asked my wife on the afternoon of the [GRO-C] what date it was and indicated that she consciously was aware that my father had died 9 years ago on the [GRO-C]. My mother passed away 9 years and one day after my father died in the same hospital. I believe that despite the fact that I spoke to her on several occasions about my father's death that she still believed that the reason my father had the stroke and subsequently died was the result of him being given contaminated blood in 1984/1985.

34. To the best of my knowledge I am unaware as to whether my father's HCV status affected their house insurance, nor if they declared his HCV status.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

35. To the best of my knowledge I do not think that my father's hospital treatment was affected by his HCV status and as far as I am aware he had no problem at all in seeing his GP when he needed to.

36. To the best of my knowledge psychological support was not offered to my father. No psychological support was offered to the rest of the family either. I believe if my mother had received counselling, she would have

mentioned it. I also think that if my mother had been offered psychological support, she would have first discussed it with the family, and knowing the explosion that she had in the hospital on the morning of 26th September 1997, we would have advised her to take the support.

37. I do not think my mother ever got over my father's death and continued to grieve for him until she also passed away. My mother and father married in 1942 and were inseparable; to the extent where it was almost like neither one had an independent life from the other they went together everywhere even to hospital and Dr's appointments.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

38. To the best of my knowledge my father did not receive any financial assistance. My mother ran the household accounts, and this was made up to a few days just before she died. I prepared all the papers and completed all the documents for my father's probate including dealing with Bank and Building Society accounts and there was no income from any support scheme. My mother's probate and dealing with her estate was all handled by the family solicitor and to the best of my knowledge there were no contacts made with any support schemes.

39. Whilst my parents considered themselves to be financially secure, to the best of my knowledge I don't know if they knew about any financial support. They never mentioned anything as such to me and I am sure they would have done so had they been made aware of financial support.

Section 8. Other issues

40. The first time the Infected Blood Inquiry appeared in the news, my brother and I discussed what we heard and talked about the fact that my father was part of it and had been told at the time of being diagnosed that there was nothing he could do about it. But we decided at that point we

could do nothing about it either. However after I saw the news items on the Treloars hearings and heard what happened to the children involved and being told they were unable to do anything about it at the time that was the straw that broke the camel's back so to speak. We thought that it was not right to sit back and do nothing about it. I started to look into the Blood Infection Inquiry and at the ways we could bring this about and over time we have thought that the Inquiry should also hear my father's story.

41. After meeting with the investigator I started to look initially on obtaining my father's GP records. Everything seemed to point to having to do it all online. I found the website and the form and started to complete it. When I tried to input my father's date of birth it would not accept his date of birth and I became very upset. I asked my brother to take on this responsibility. My brother contacted the local GP surgery my father was as a patient at was told he needed a solicitor and there would be charges. He pointed out the section in the inquiry notes which state you don't. They referred him to a central surgery in Belle Vue Way Hartlepool where all the records were held.
42. My brother contacted them and he was told he needed a solicitor and there would be a charge. He again pointed out the section in the inquiry notes which states you don't. They said he would need to speak to the Practice/Business Manager but they were in a meeting and unavailable. He was advised the Practice/Business Manager would be available the next day and to call back then.
43. The next day he again was told the Practice/Business Manager was in a meeting and would be in meetings all day. The secretary to the Practice/Business Manager looked for the records and told him she could not find any. When he told her my father had died she then advised those records were held on Teesside and gave a telephone number to ring. But in half an hour she rang my brother back and said he didn't have to ring them as he could do it all online and it would be better if he did it online. She

guided him through the website and to the forms to fill in online. She advised that he would be given a reference number because due to the length of the documents to be filled in online he probably couldn't do it all in one sitting. This is where we are at regarding only trying to get the GP medical records. We will update the Inquiry when we hear further.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

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Dated 18/12/2021