

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PAMELA ABBOTT

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry rules 2006 dated 7th October 2022. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I, Pamela Abbott will say as follows:-

1. Introduction

1. My name is Pamela Abbott. My date of birth is GRO-C 1950 and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. On the GRO-C 1972 I was married to Graham Oliver. Together, we are the biological birth parents of Benjamin Graham Oliver born GRO-C 1977 and GRO-B born GRO-C 1979. In 1987 I was divorced from my husband Graham Oliver and subsequently remarried in 1995 to Martin Abbott.

3. I am providing this statement to record my experience of raising two sons with Haemophilia A and my experience of having one of those sons, Benjamin Graham Oliver, infected with Hepatitis C (HCV) as a result of his treatment.

2. How Affected

1. In mid December 1979, at 15 months old, my son Benjamin Graham Oliver having watched his father, then decided to give himself a shave and accidentally cut himself. I can recall that this cut was below the lower lip and minor in itself, being nothing more than a small flap of skin that had lifted, and I can also recall that blood flowed from that injury and did so for 19 hours.
2. During those 19 hours I sought assistance locally with a pharmacist, who suggested using a styptic pencil. When this failed to stop the bleeding, I took Ben to a walk-in centre, who said to go to A&E at Dryburn Hospital, County Durham. Using basic first aid techniques, they managed to stem the flow of blood to a stop. The medical staff at Dryburn Hospital were concerned with the persistent bleeding, and Ben was admitted overnight for observation. I stayed in hospital with him overnight, and my mother took GRO-B back home.
3. The following day, on the advice of medical staff at Dryburn Hospital I attended the Haemophilia Centre at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle upon Tyne with Ben and my other son GRO-B. My husband Graham also attended.
4. At the Haemophilia Centre I was met by Dr Peter Jones, a Consultant of the Centre, and a Nursing Sister called Maureen Fearn. During this visit, the staff took various medical tests on Ben and GRO- I cannot recall the exact nature

of those tests, but would have likely involved a blood sample from both children. I recall that the staff here also took blood samples from myself and my husband. We were advised to return home and that they would call us later that day.

5. Later that day, my husband and I were advised that the test undertaken at the Haemophilia Centre had confirmed that both Ben and my other son GRO-B had the medical condition known as Haemophilia. It may have been then or subsequently, but I was informed that I carried the condition of Haemophilia. There was no reference to the condition in my husbands tests. I have never suffered from any condition associated with Haemophilia.
6. I initially had no knowledge of the medical condition called Haemophilia. When both my sons were born there was no indication that such a medical condition was present in either myself or my husband or either of our sons. To my knowledge, there was no history of Haemophilia in my family or that of my husbands. However, my mother was later tested and she was also found to be a carrier of the condition.
7. Following that diagnosis to Ben and GRO-B I was asked to return to the Haemophilia Centre with them the following day. Arrangements were put in place to organise a blood bank relative to both my sons, and to organise a protocol for our family should either of my sons suffer an injury or incur an internal or external bleed.
8. This protocol was centred around the provision of blood products that would be administered to my sons. Those blood products to my knowledge were blood, plasma and Factor 8 (a blood clotting protein). These were to be

administered to my sons to enhance and support a coagulant reaction which inhibits, reduces and in most cases stops the flow of blood following an injury.

9. From my own experience on a personal level, this diagnosis came as a great shock to myself. My fear was compounded by my ignorance of the condition in that how could I protect my children. I struck up a very supportive and assistive relationship with Dr Peter Jones and Sister Maureen Fearn.

10. My relationship with them was such that it was based unconditionally on my trust and that of my husbands. I trusted the staff at the Haemophilia Centre to act and provide medical services to both my sons to the highest standards of the day, and I saw no reason to doubt their ability to do that. I found that Dr Peter Jones displayed a high degree of interest and empathy with my sons and provided me with confidence that the protocols arranged were correct and without question. Had that issue of confidence been placed into question, I would recall that as a significant event as one of two primary carers for my children's health, welfare and treatment as Haemophiliacs.

11. From late 1979 to the present day, my sons Ben and GRO-B have both received blood products at the Haemophilia Centre as and when it was needed. In their early years I or sometimes my husband would accompany them, and then in their teen years they would attend on their own with my knowledge. I have no record or recall as to how many times they received blood products at the Haemophilia Centre or what type or quantity but it was numerous and repetitive especially in their early years. In due course, both my sons were taught how to intravenously administer coagulant products and I stored such products along with distilled water in my fridge at home.

12. I can recall that there was a transition of products from a pure blood product, administered via an intravenous drip, which took several hours to complete, to a manufactured blood product called Cryoprecipitate which was administered intravenously in an injection and completed in about half an hour. Treatment was also dependant on the type of injury being treated, and would vary between the two depending on which treatment was most appropriate. The change from a blood product to a manufactured product (Cryoprecipitate) occurred during their early school years at Newlands School Newcastle upon Tyne, being between the years 1982 – 1991.
13. When both my sons were toddlers, I attended the Haemophilia Centre at least two or three times a week, probably more, where they received a blood product following a bleed. Indeed, such was the frequency of those visits, our family moved from County Durham to Wallsend North Tyneside sometime in the early Eighties so that we could be nearer the Haemophilia Centre and be able to attend quicker with them should such an emergency arise.
14. Visits to the centre decreased in part as they got older and were more steady on their feet; certainly for minor injury. As they got older and were more adventurous, the injuries were slightly less frequent, but worse and more impactful.
15. When Ben was in early adulthood, I am aware that he suffered a head injury while drunk and messing around with a friend at his father's house. Following this, he sought medical attention at the hospital. Due to the amount of alcohol he'd had, he wasn't able to communicate his needs coherently with the staff.
16. During this admission, his medical background was reviewed and I understand that it was disclosed to Ben from that review that he had

contracted Hepatitis C (HCV) sometime in the past. Subsequently, Ben informed me of this disclosure and that his own body had rejected this virus and that subsequent medical tests confirmed that it had self cleared. I have no knowledge as to how my son contracted this virus, but I can confirm that at this time he was still within treatment at the Haemophilia Centre.

17. I was never directly informed by the Haemophilia Centre that Ben had contracted HCV.

3. Other infections

1. I do not believe that Ben received any further infections other than Hepatitis C (HCV) as a result of being given blood products.

4. Consent

1. I do not believe that my sons were ever informed of any risk of infection resulting from treatment for Haemophilia. I can state this with a degree of accuracy as neither I nor my husband as primary carers for our children were ever advised of this threat.

5. Impact

1. The condition of Haemophilia affected both my sons in different ways. Not only were they restricted in their activities at school in case they were injured

(such' as sports or physical education) but also by the general ignorance that others considered were relevant and believed to be true about the condition.

2. Both my sons went to Newlands School (now called Newcastle School for Boys) which is a private fee paying school. The school staff were aware of their condition should an event occur which required treatment. That knowledge was disclosed by my husband and I to the school and which we considered confidential and private.
3. Sometime between 1982 - 1987 both boys were requested to be removed on the instruction [GRO-D]. In explanation, it appeared that a nurse seconded to the Haemophilia Centre at the RVI, who was the parent of a child at the same school, had found the medical records of Ben and [GRO-B] which were kept on file there. This nurse had contacted the [GRO-D] and disclosed to [GRO-D] (who was aware of their condition) that as they had Haemophilia they were capable of spreading the HIV Virus commonly known as AIDS to other children and that if they were not removed from the school promptly, that such medical information would be disclosed to other parents who in turn would remove their children from the school. I attended the school to speak with [GRO-D] whom explained to me that as well as a being a school, it was a business, and such bad press could have an adverse effect on the schools finances and he confirmed his wish that both Ben and [GRO-B] be removed. I took both boys home and contacted Dr Peter Jones immediately and explained what had happened.
4. He took ownership of the issue and made a personal visit to speak to [GRO-D] [GRO-D] and as a consequence of that meeting both boys were allowed to return to the school after three days. The nurse who disclosed the medical

information was as Dr Peter Jones explained to me, disciplined and removed from the Haemophilia Centre. From a personal point, I found other parents who I would previously meet at drop off and collect times, seemed to ignore me following this event, and while once chatty were now aloof. I drew the conclusion that the nurse's information, as wrong as it was, had been disclosed. Both boys did not understand what had happened, but I was hurt and angry as a consequence.

5. Equally, both boys experienced some bullying at school, and were called names like green blood and AIDS boy. I tried to play this down with both boys in an attempt to defuse the situation. However, this did impact on them as they would reiterate events of harassment and name calling which was hurtful not only to them both but to me as their mother. This was aggravated by the knowledge that their medical condition had been unlawfully and unnecessarily disclosed in the first place.

6. Treatment/Care Support

1. I believe Ben self-cleared HCV. I cannot comment further regarding his treatment, care or support for HCV.

7. Financial Assistance

1. I have not applied or received any financial assistance from any of the Trusts or Funds. My son Ben may have provided further information in his statement.

8. Other Issues

1. I am aware that people can contract Hepatitis C in different ways, for example through sharing needles during illegal drug abuse and in some cases unprotected sexual contact. I can state that to the best of my knowledge the life style of my son Ben was not indicative to those possibilities. I am, however, concerned that Ben may have been infected when he was under the age of 18, as he would have been a child and then young person at the time. I feel that I and my husband should have been informed of this information.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.

GRO-C

Dated... 28.10.2022