

Witness Name: Suzanne Audrey Lucas

Statement No: WITN7444001

Exhibits:0

Dated: November 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SUZANNE AUDREY LUCAS

I, Suzanne Audrey Lucas, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Suzanne Audrey Lucas. I was born on GRO-C 1951. I live at GRO-C
GRO-C Hampshire, GRO-C.
2. I make this statement in connection with my late daughter, Joanne Claire Storey (Jo), who was born on GRO-C 1976 and died, aged 39, on 5 June 2016, having contracted Hepatitis C (HCV) via a contaminated blood transfusion following scoliosis surgery aged 12 at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH).
3. I have now retired, and whilst Jo was still with us, I remarried a wonderful man who was a brilliant dad to Jo, as was her father.
4. Jo's father, John Griffiths (WITN7287001) and her husband, Jonathan Storey (WITN7288001) have both provided witness statements to the Inquiry and I refer to these in terms of some of the factual and background information.

5. This witness statement has been prepared with the benefit of access to all of Jo's medical records.

Section 2. How Affected

6. Jo was infected with HCV via a contaminated blood transfusion post spinal surgery, aged 12, at GOSH.
7. As far as I am aware, neither Jo nor her family were given any advice or information regarding the risk of infection from blood transfusions.
8. In or around 1995, we went for a routine check-up with Jo's heart doctors at GOSH when we were told that Jo had contracted HCV via a contaminated blood transfusion. Apart from this one meeting, I don't recall that HCV was raised again by any doctor, apart from the one occasion when HCV treatment was mentioned. It was almost as if the HCV had been totally airbrushed out of the equation despite the fact that Jo continued attending GOSH on a regular basis to have her heart monitored.
9. We received absolutely no information or advice regarding what being infected with HCV would mean for Jo; we had no information about the risks of transmission or prognosis. I feel that Jo and our family were let down in this regard. She should have received ongoing follow up, advice and her liver should have been regularly checked and monitored. However, I do want to add that the care Jo received from GOSH in relation to her heart was very good.
10. I also refer to the evidence of John and Jonathan in relation to this section.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. Apart from HCV, I don't believe that Jo was infected with any other viruses as a result of the contaminated blood transfusion.

Section 4. Consent

12. As far as I recall, neither Jo nor her family were informed that she was being tested for HCV. Jo was therefore tested for HCV without her knowledge and consent. Based on this fact, it is therefore entirely possible that she was also tested for other infections without her knowledge and consent.
13. I am aware that this contradicts with what Jo's father's recollection was which was that Jo had not been treated or tested without her knowledge or consent.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

14. Jo was a wonderful daughter and my best friend; we were so close, more like sisters, and she told me everything.
15. When Jo passed away, I received so many heartfelt messages from her friends and work colleagues telling me how much Jo had helped them with their mental health struggles. It took my breath away hearing so many amazing stories of how Jo had helped people through really difficult periods of their lives. It made me even prouder of Jo if that were even possible. What she achieved and the way in which she touched peoples' lives, despite her own real struggles in life, was beyond incredible and so inspiring. If anyone ever asked Jo how she was, her answer was always "*I am fine*". Jo never complained about life, and she was always so happy and upbeat despite the many health challenges she faced during her life.
16. I think the most soul-destroying part of the HCV for Jo was the fact that it meant that she was not able to become a mum. Jo adored children and I know how much she wanted to be a mum; she would have been a truly wonderful mum. This was devastating for both Jo and Jonathan; both of whom would have been fantastic parents. It also made John, myself, and my new

husband sad to think that we would not become grandparents to Jo's children. Prior to her HCV infection and despite the heart problems, Jo had been told by the medical professionals that they would try and help her to realise her dream of becoming a mum. However, the HCV put paid to this.

17. I want to say that Jonathan has been a truly wonderful husband to Jo and has stood by her throughout life's challenges and has been her rock. I know Jo was a great support to him as well. They were so well suited and had a lovely relationship. Jonathan is, and will always remain, part of our family.
18. In terms of the physical effects of the HCV, it is difficult to comment as it was not until 1995 that we found out about Jo's infection. It is therefore hard to tease out exactly which problems were, and were not, caused by the HCV. Jo always said she was fine and never complained which made it even harder to decipher which physical health problems which were attributable to HCV. Obviously, unbeknown to Jo and the family, the effects of the HCV were already irreversibly damaging Jo's physical health. Looking back now I can see that Jo was probably a lot sicker than any of us realised at the time.
19. The mental anguish of the infection was draining and took its toll on the family. It was the constant worry of not knowing what could happen. It is hard to gauge how Jo felt mentally regarding her infection. I think it was difficult for Jo because she was already dealing with a whole raft of other physical health problems and then the awful HCV was thrown into the mix. It is also hard to gauge the mental effect on Jo because she never wanted to talk about being ill or discuss negative things. She was the most upbeat and buoyant person and I think this helped her mentally process and deal with the HCV infection. Jo dealt with matters in such a focused, resilient and brave manner. She managed to get on with her life and dealt with each and every obstacle along the way with the most amazing smile on her face. She was unfailingly positive.
20. Jo used to work in the opticians where she also took new employees under her wing. She was thoughtful and caring and always put others' needs before those of her own, even when she was already dealing with so much herself.

21. Jo was such a happy soul and I miss her every day. We never thought she would get married and when Jonathan came along things just fell into place for Jo. Jo found the positives in life, and I will always remember her pure excitement at every birthday for the simple fact that she had made it to another year. She was just happy that she was alive, and I think so many people could learn a lot from Jo's remarkable outlook on life.

22. We are supporting Jonathan, who is truly heartbroken and currently struggling with flashbacks, following the loss of his dear Jo. We are trying to encourage him to go out and build a new chapter for himself. I know that this is what Jo would have wanted for him; she was so selfless and would only want the best for Jonathan. However, at present Jonathan cannot bear to let any girls get too close to him and says "*no-one is like Jo*".

23. I also refer to the evidence given by John and Jonathan in relation to this section.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

24. I understand that Jo was offered treatment, but she declined this. However, I believe that if Jo had been properly informed about the consequences of what being infected with HCV was then she would have accepted the treatment. I feel that Jo and her family were let down by the doctors in relation to the HCV in that there was no follow up, further testing, monitoring of her liver or advice in relation to the HCV. GOSH were good in relation to the care of Jo's heart but sadly that was all they were interested in. GOSH totally ignored the HCV and it felt like it was put in a box.

25. Neither Jo nor I have ever been offered counselling or psychological support in consequence of her HCV infection.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

26. I refer to the witness evidence of John and Jonathan in this regard. However, my recollection is that it was Jo's father who found out about the Skipton Fund (SF). He dealt with the application procedure and all matters associated with the SF.

Section 8. Other Issues

27. I would like the Inquiry to publicly deal with matters. So many people have suffered and their lives and those of their loved ones have been far from easy.

Anonymity

28. I do not wish to apply for anonymity.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed..... GRO-C

Dated..... 20/11/22