

Witness Name: Catherine Guthrie

Statement No.: WITN7499001

Exhibits: WITN7499002-004

Dated: 06 January 2023

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CATHERINE GUTHRIE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5th November 2018.

I, Catherine Guthrie, will say as follows: -

Section 1: Introduction

1. My Name is Catherine Guthrie. My date of birth is GRO-C 1931. My address is known to the Inquiry. I was married to my late husband George McBain for over 20 years before he died with Hepatitis on 22 May 1997. I have 2 sons from my previous marriage, Robert Boath and Andrew McBain. My husband George adopted my sons, but Robert did not change his name as he was already enlisted in the Royal Air Force.
2. I intend to speak about my infection of hepatitis B, in particular the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me and the impact it had.
3. I do not wish to be anonymous for this statement.

Section 2: How Infected

4. In February 1972 I was admitted to Bridge of Earn Hospital near Perth for investigations into heavy vaginal bleeding. In March I was admitted to Dundee Royal Infirmary and underwent two 72-hour radium treatments. During this time, I was kept in isolation. My body did not handle the radiation well and the treatments were stopped. It took 3 months before I was recovered enough to be able to undergo a hysterectomy.
5. On 22 June 1972 I was admitted to Bridge of Earn Hospital where I underwent a Wertheim's hysterectomy. My appendix was also removed at the same time. I recall that the surgery lasted for about 9 hours and during that time I believe that I was given 8 pints of blood. At no point before or after the surgery was I told that I was to have a blood transfusion nor warned about the risks of infection from blood.
6. By October 1972 I was feeling really terrible. I had no energy, and I could not cook or clean or take care of my children. I remember that I had to be lifted out of the bath and I was unable to eat for feeling sick. I went to see my GP in GRO-C as this had been going on for a month or so. I remember on the walk to the GP surgery I had to lean against every windowsill I passed I was so weak. My GP Dr Muir at first just prescribed my anti-sickness tablets. As I was leaving, I said to the doctor I thought I had jaundice. The Dr Muir then told me to go back into his office as he wanted to examine me properly. Dr Muir weight me and I had lost 2 stone. He agreed that I look jaundiced and wanted to call an ambulance to take me to a hospital. I told him that my parents who were at my home looking after my boys could take me instead.
7. My parents drove me to Bridge of Earn Hospital on 16 October 1972 and I was admitted for further testing after presenting as really jaundiced. A week later I was diagnosed with Hepatitis. There was no mention by anyone at the hospital that I has hepatitis B, HBV or the hepatitis B surface antigen

specifically. While my records show this was “serum Hepatitis” and “Australia antigen positive” (WITN7499002), at the time I was unaware at the time there was more than one kind of Hepatitis and I do not recall being told I had anything other than just Hepatitis. I believe at the time the test results came back my parents were told that it was likely I only had 3 weeks to live. This was very traumatic for not only me but my whole family as we all believed that I would die.

8. I was transferred to King's Cross Hospital in Dundee and put in a ward for infectious diseases. I was kept in isolation and all the doctors and nurses wore special clothing when they came near me. I recall when I was first admitted the doctor kept on insisting that I was an alcoholic. I was shocked by this as I had never even tried alcohol at that point, let alone developed a drinking problem. The doctor kept on demanding that I admit that I had a drinking problem. I was feeling so ill that being subjected to that was an awful experience. Then I was told that I had hepatitis caused by the 8 pints of blood I was given during my operation.

9. I was given various drugs and started feeling a little better. I was kept in hospital until 30 October when I was sent home to recover. It took about a further month for my appetite to return, at which point I weighed only 5.5 stone, where at the beginning of the year I had weighed 9 stone.

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 I was given no advice on how to manage having Hepatitis and was given no indication of the risks of infecting other people. I was not told if I was still infectious to others or not after I was sent home.

Section 3: Other Infections

11. I am not aware of being exposed to any other infections from the blood transfusion except for Hepatitis B.

Section 4: Consent

12. While I was aware that I was being tested for hepatitis while in hospital due to having jaundice, I was too ill to know for sure that I was being tested or treated or what any treatments I was given were.
13. While I consented to the tests performed to diagnose me while in hospital, I was so ill that no consent was sought from me for any of the treatment I was given.
14. I do believe I was treated without being given adequate or full information as I was never made aware of what the different drugs I was given were while I was in hospital.
15. I believe that it is possible that my blood has been used in some form of research, however I have no way of knowing this for sure.

Section 5: Impact

16. The main physical side effects from having Hepatitis B happened when I was first diagnosed. I was so ill my family were told I had 3 weeks to live, and it took me weeks, if not months to recover from the initial illness. I lost about 3.5 stone in weight, and I have suffered from chronic fatigue ever since. I have spent the rest of my life feeling constantly tired and wanting to just sit and do nothing every day.
17. About seven years ago, I went to see a specialist at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary as I could not keep much food down and kept being sick. I was told I had to have my gallbladder removed as the doctors found that it was covered in abnormal growths and had become fused to my liver. I was told by the specialist that they had never seen it happen before, but I believe that it could

be attributed to me having Hepatitis as my liver was, and still is, covered in polyps. Since then, I have had long lasting issues with eating and nutrition.

18. Even today if I do not watch what I eat very carefully I become very ill. In around 2017 I was being so violently sick the paramedics had to be called. I think that the only reason that I have lived so long is that I tried to keep myself as healthy and active as I can despite the pain. I have never smoked not drank alcohol and been very careful with my diet. I have also kept myself busy with different crafting projects as a way to keep pushing through everything.

19. I do not know if there were other treatments I could have been given to cure or help with the effects of Hepatitis B. I was so unwell in hospital that I still today do not know when treatments I have already been given.

20. I think that despite what I suffered physically, most of the impacts of having Hepatitis B have been mental. Even today when I think of all I have suffered it makes me really upset. I lived a very hard life after being infected. Financially we struggled greatly for many years. I also suffered a lot from the stigma of having Hepatitis.

21. In such a small town like GRO-C it was well known that I had Hepatitis. I recall that people would cross the street away from me and I was treated like a leper. I remember the voices that would follow me around the town of people saying, "don't go near her, she's got Hepatitis". It also had an effect on my family as my sister who worked in a food shop at the time lost a few weeks of work GRO-C
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22. I also remember the worry and stress as my whole family, including my parents GRO-C The thought that I could and have passed on the infection to others has always followed me.

23. I unknowingly passed Hepatitis onto my husband before I knew there was even a risk of cross contamination. About a month after I was released from Kings Cross Hospital, he became very ill, although he did not need to go to

hospital. I believe that my husband never recovered, and although he never got so sick as to need to stay in hospital, the effects seemed to hit George harder than they did me. I believe that his early death was a direct result of complications that came from being infected with Hepatitis. I was then left a widow at 55 years old.

24. The result of both me and my husband having Hepatitis was that during the year I was unable to work, my husband was also unable to work for 3 months. We ended up receiving a combined sickness benefit of £17 per week and really struggled, especially as we had our 15-year-old son to support also. We ended up draining our savings and my son Andrew had to leave school and take a job as an apprentice joiner to help support us. My husband had to have two or three separate physical exams done before he was allowed to return to work in the paper mill. However, due to the high risk of being cut and cross contamination, he was moved away from working with the paper directly to working in the office.

25. My son, husband and I later decided to run a hotel together. Due to the continuing effects of having Hepatitis, this became more and more of a struggle for him to keep up with and the work became too much so we decided to sell the hotel. I later decided to go into business with my son Robert to buy the Kirkland's Hotel. I remember that the morning we took over the running of the hotel was same day that my husband passed away. This was really hard as I had to go straight from the hospital to the hotel and prepare breakfast for all the guests as my role in the business was to do all the cooking and cleaning myself. I had no choice in this as I could not afford to do otherwise.

26. The other person who was greatly impacted by my having Hepatitis is my son Andrew. Being 15 years old and getting told by my parents that I had only weeks to live traumatised Andrew GRO-C
Despite this I have relied on Andrew since I was infected. He left school to provide a source of income to our family and did not get to pursue further

education and go to university until he was in his 30's. Andrew's whole life changed because of my infection.

Section 6: Treatment/Care/Support

27. Besides my initial hospitalisation, I never received any treatment for Hepatitis itself. I have been treated in the past for side effects that I believe are a result of having Hepatitis B, but I have never had any issues in accessing these. The biggest issue when accessing care is that I was told that I had to tell every doctor and medical professional about having Hepatitis since I was first diagnosed, despite the stigma of having such an illness at the time.

Section 7: Financial Assistance

28. I applied to the Skipton Fund now known as SIBBS around the beginning of 2018. At this time, I believed that I had been infected with was Hepatitis C. This belief came from a card I was told to carry with me and show to every doctor. The card I currently have was issued by the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary on 11 January 2007 (**WITN7499003**). This card states "Plasma Contains Anti Cw", so I have always assumed this meant I had Hepatitis C.

29. It was not until I received a letter back from SIBBS on 6 February 2018 (**WITN7499004**), refusing my application, that I was told that the Serum Hepatitis, Australian antigen meant I had Hepatitis B.

30. I did my best to investigate my case further and tried to obtain my hospital records, but I was told they had lost, all I had were a very few notes from my own GP. I decided to see the then retired Dr Wood who had treated me for years after I was infected and had seen the impact it had had on me, as I thought he would be willing to assist. However, all he said when I asked was "why should you pursue the matter, you're still alive, is that not enough". I did not believe I had any way to appeal the decision after this, so I left it there.

31.I have not applied for, nor received any other financial support or compensation as a result of being infected with Hepatitis B.

Section 8: Other Issues

32.I believe that financial support should be extended to those who suffered from Hepatitis B. I was infected with Hepatitis B from 8 pints of infected blood, and it has had a massive impact on the rest of my life. I have spent most of my life going back and forth to hospital appointments and getting blood tests and I had no financial support with this despite it being far to travel.

33.The reason for me giving this statement is not just about compensation, but about truthfulness and accountability for those who have swept all this under the carpet. I believe that the NHS knew in the 1970's that people were being infected with serum hepatitis through blood transfusions, but they did nothing about it. I recall that when I was infected in 1972 a doctor and a nurse in Edinburgh both died from Hepatitis.

Statement Of Truth

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

Signed

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Dated

11/1/2023