

Witness Name: Sharon Fay

Statement No: WITN7504001

Exhibits: WITN7504002

Dated: December 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SHARON FAY

I, Sharon Fay, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sharon Fay and I am married and I have two adult sons. I was born on GRO-C 1970, and I live at GRO-C East Sussex, GRO-C
2. I believe I was infected with Hepatitis C as a result of receiving a transfusion of contaminated blood during emergency surgery for an overdose of antidepressants in 1974 at the age of three.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my medical records.

Section 2. How Infected

4. In 1974 I was admitted into the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Brighton where, following imipramine poisoning, I received emergency surgery. An internal jugular vein cut-down was performed as part of this procedure and I believe I received a blood transfusion. Some medical elements of my surgery were deemed noteworthy enough to justify a report being published in the *British Medical Journal* 1974, which is particularly useful as it lists, in some detail, the surgery that I underwent, save it omits mentioning the saphenous vein cut down I understand I also underwent [WTIN7504002].

5. I received an overdose of anti-depressants GRO-C
GRO-C and, after my surgery, I was released into the care of my older brother who was an adult at this stage. I was, quite understandably, told very little about this surgery when I was younger and was only told the full details of my operation by my GP Dr DJ Simler in or around 1987, when I was about seventeen.

6. My mother would not have been in a fit state to discuss my surgery, so I imagine that my father would have been told of the risks of infection from receiving whole blood, but I do not know this. I have never had the chance to ask him about his role during my surgery as he died before I found out that I had been infected.

7. I did not experience any immediate symptoms of Hepatitis C following my surgery. In fact, it was only in 2021 that I began to feel its full effects, as I was experiencing severe fatigue. As the symptom persisted, and it negatively affected my work and social life, I went through a barrage of scans and blood tests in an attempt to obtain a diagnosis.
8. I was on the way to a chronic fatigue clinic, on 13 May 2022, when my GP Dr Cathy Burgess phoned me to tell me that my blood tests had tested positive for Hepatitis C.
9. We discussed how I could have contracted the infection and Dr Burgess concluded that it was likely from my surgery when I was three years old. I would mention that I also had surgery on my throat in 1983 which may have required me to receive a blood transfusion. I have also had surgeries for the removal of my gall bladder and thyroid more recently, neither of which I believe have involved me receiving a blood transfusion.
10. The conversation that I had with Cathy was very informative. She sent me links to the NHS pages regarding the symptoms and risks of hepatitis and to the Trust websites. She informed me that my children and husband would be at risk of infection and that they should be tested for any hepatitis. Thankfully, none of my family have tested positive for any infections.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. I have not been infected with any infection other than Hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

12. My father would have been the one to have given consent to any treatment, but I have no idea if he did in fact give his consent for my surgery or a blood transfusion.

13. I feel that I cannot criticise the medical staff for them giving me a blood transfusion as it was an emergency procedure and their actions ultimately saved my life.

Section 5. Impact

14. My infection with Hepatitis C has had wide ranging and varied effects on the state of my physical health. One of the first things I did upon learning of my infection was correlating its reported effects with my own pre-diagnosed health issues.

15. It is noted on the Hepatitis C Trust website that some the side effects of having the more severe liver disease associated with Hepatitis C is that the gallbladder can become persistently inflamed and cause nausea and

vomiting. This is what happened to me, and I then had surgery for its removal in 2018 to alleviate my symptoms.

16. I also suffered from thyroid dysfunction. As such, I had my thyroid removed this year. I believe that my Hepatitis C may have caused my immune system to provoke my thyroid tissue.

17. The most noticeable symptom, which was the primary factor in my diagnosis of Hepatitis C, was my fatigue. This has had significant physical, social and mental effects on me.

18. The physical tiredness has made everything harder for me. I am a self-employed Behavioral Analyst working with children and adults with autism. The lack of energy that I have experienced has negatively affected my performance, for example I struggled with the revalidation of my certification. I have had to stop working afternoons and, as I'm self-employed, this means that I am essentially receiving half the pay I used to. Whilst my energy levels have improved in the last few weeks, this has been an issue for me since October 2021, which means that I have lost around half a year's wages.

19. It has also meant that I could not go out with my friends, as I fall asleep about 6p.m. This has been really disheartening. Also, I have felt the need to keep my infection a secret as I did not feel comfortable with my close friends or extended family knowing about my infection.

20. I have had to deal with the fear of infecting my family. I have to clean everything around me and I have to keep a distance from my husband, which puts a strain on our relationship. I do, however, feel lucky to have married such a supportive amazing man.

21. It has also meant that I have been unable to properly see my brother who is 82 years old. Being unable to see him has been something that the two of us have quite missed.

22. I have had no real issue accessing treatment for my Hepatitis C. Originally, I was told that it would take nine months to be started on any form of treatment, however I decided to visit a local private clinic for a consultation. A week later I was visiting my consultant at an NHS hospital for treatment.

23. I have been on a 12-week course of Zepatier. It has caused flu-like symptoms since the first week in addition to rhinitis, headaches and stomach problems. It has been successful; my viral load at the beginning of my treatment was roughly two million, nine hundred thousand, but it has since plummeted to twenty-eight.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

24. I have had no trouble accessing treatment for my Hepatitis C. I was not offered counselling or mental support for my infection at any stage.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

25. At this moment in time, I have received no financial support from EIBSS. I applied to them once I found their information on the Hepatitis C Trust website and tried to apply with the assistance of my hepatology nurse.

26. I have struggled because I have not been able to find any medical records for my surgeries in 1974 or in 1983 or any medical records prior to 1988. I have been told by my GP that there are no medical records at all, however I do not believe that this can be possible, as some notes must have been reviewed when the Consultants prepared and published my case in the *British Medical Journal* referred to above.

27. I suspect that my GP does not have the facilities to search for my medical records as their practice is understaffed. As I have no evidence that I received a blood transfusion, I have been unable to successfully apply to EIBSS for financial aid.

Section 8. Other Issues

28. I do not wish for my surgery that I received in 1974 to be overshadowed by my disappointment in being infected with Hepatitis C and being unable to access my medical records. Having read the report, I am grateful to my doctors, and I fully understand that if it were not for their expertise, I would not be here today.

29. However, on a practical level I have suffered from being infected with Hepatitis C, financially, mentally and physically and I consider that it is unfair for me to have to bear the burden without compensation.

30. I believe that compensation should be paid out to those infected and affected and that there should be special allowances made for people in scenarios where they have struggled to obtain their medical records. It is frustrating when there is nothing that people such as myself can do to speed up the process of finding them.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

31. I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.....

GRO-C

Dated.....

6/12/22