

Witness Name: Graham Binks

Statement No.: **WITN0288001**

Exhibits: **WITN0288002**

Dated: 23/01/2019

04 FEB 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRAHAM BINKS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 12 October 2018.

I, Graham Binks, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Graham Binks. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry. I have two sons aged 46 and 44 and I am retired.
2. I intend to speak about my late wife, Margaret Binks. She was infected with Hepatitis C. In particular, I will detail the nature of her illness, how the illness affected her, the treatment received and the impact it had on her and our lives together.

Section 2. How Affected

3. Prior to the birth of our sons in 1972 and 1974, my late wife Margaret had enjoyed extremely good health.

4. My wife received blood transfusions in 1972 and 1974 at the Hyde Terrace Maternity Unit of the Leeds Teaching Hospitals following the birth of each of our sons. She informed me about these blood transfusions but I have no knowledge of how many units of blood were given on each occasion and precisely why she was given the blood transfusions – I imagine a lot of women require blood transfusions after giving birth.
5. On the first occasion in 1972 my wife and eldest son were kept in hospital for 3 weeks on account of GRO-C before being discharged.
6. On the second occasion in 1974 my wife and youngest son were kept in hospital for 12 days before being discharged.
7. As far as I am aware, the doctors did not discuss any risks of infection with my wife and certainly not with me before giving her the blood transfusions.

Diagnosis

8. Following the birth of our second child my wife never enjoyed good health again.
9. My wife visited our GP. After initial tests, the GP suspected Hepatitis and she was referred to the specialist liver unit at St. James's Hospital in Leeds for biopsy (a needle was inserted into her liver) and other tests.
10. Within a short time, she was diagnosed with what, at the time, was described as "Chronic Aggressive Hepatitis", on account of which she was hospitalised in St. James's Hospital for approximately 6 weeks in June/July/August 1975.

11. At the time in question, it would appear that the terms "Hepatitis C" and "Hepatitis B" were not in use and the disease was termed "Chronic Aggressive Hepatitis".
12. My wife found out about this diagnosis at the hospital from Mr Lossowski (the Consultant). I was not there at the time. We sought and received a full explanation of the diagnosis. I cannot remember what they said in terms of managing the infection. As far as I am aware, no information was provided about the risks, if any, of infecting others as a result of her disease.
13. No proposition was put forward or theory advanced as to how my wife might have contracted the disease.
14. Naturally we were both depressed to learn that she had "Chronic Aggressive Hepatitis" but as fairly resilient people, we continued to conduct as normal a family life as possible

Section 3. Other Infections

15. My wife was only infected with "Chronic Aggressive Hepatitis" and nothing else.

Section 4. Consent

16. My wife's consent was sought for all the tests and treatment. I am not aware of any tests or treatments which were carried out without her consent. I have no criticism whatever of those who treated her.

Section 5. Impact

Impact of infection: mental and physical effects

17. Following my wife's discharge from hospital in 1975, her health continued slowly to deteriorate. Over the next few years the yellowing

of the skin and eyes became more marked as did swelling of the body, face and feet and chronic fatigue, which necessitated her spending an increasing amount of time in bed. Obviously this was depressing but she was a strong character and we made the best of it.

Further medical complications

18. My wife did not have any further medical complications as a result of the infection.

Course of their illness

19. My wife was hospitalised again in the early summer of 1979, again in St. James's for several weeks. On her discharge we were given to understand that she could only expect to live for another 6 months – depressing news, not least because she would be leaving behind her two young sons (although she coped with it very well).
20. We all know that we are mortal but an “end date” concentrates the mind. Imagine being on an aeroplane that is slowly descending but you know is guaranteed to crash.
21. Awareness of impending doom is obviously depressing for other family members. The difference is that we were aware that we would eventually emerge from the tunnel. Margaret knew that she would not. You go into a country of your own and to a certain extent Margaret did, which I understand.
22. After several months at home – spending increasing amounts of time in bed – in late January 1980 she began to haemorrhage, coughing up large amounts of blood and was rushed into St. James's by ambulance.
23. Whilst in hospital, she required a substantial number of transfusions when the rupture of her oesophageal varices resulted in large volumes

of blood being ejected and the insertion of a "Sengstacken Tube" (a rubber tube inserted down the throat and inflated like a balloon in an effort to stop the bleeding). I was amazed at the amount of blood going in and out and that anyone could survive.

24. For several days I lived and slept at the Hospital and was with her when, at the age of 43, she died on the 25th of January 1980.

Treatment

25. My wife was put on steroids at some stage. I do not know exactly what was discussed but I know they explained the side effects of the steroids. I remember the treatment was ongoing and do not recall any particular time scale of the treatment.
26. In terms of the side effects of the treatment, it is hard for me to distinguish between the side effects of the steroids and the side effects of the Hepatitis. Her feet, face and hands were swollen but besides that nothing else springs to mind.
27. There was no difficulty in accessing this treatment.
28. I got the impression there wasn't a lot they could do. Unfortunately, at the time in question, liver transplant procedures had not yet been developed.

Impact: my wife's private, family and social life

29. Margaret was a devoted wife and mother – she was as good, kind and gentle a human being as you are likely to meet - but, inevitably, the chronic fatigue associated with the disease restricted the time and energy available for her to devote to family life.

30. Our large extended families and my wife's friends knew about her situation. They were very sorry to hear that she was ill. She was well-liked and they were tremendously supportive.

Impact: my private, family and social life

31. Whilst the situation was obviously depressing, especially in the last few months before my wife passed away, we were both resilient people and focused on providing my sons with as normal a home life as possible.
32. One never fully recovers from the death of a partner and, even 38 years on, I am no stranger to tears.
33. I had not been expecting to find myself a "widower" at the age of 33 and explaining to a 5 year-old (who was too young to understand the finality of death) and his 7 year-old brother, neither of whom, although they realised that their Mother was ill, had any inkling of the seriousness of the situation, that they would never see their Mother again, is the hardest thing I've ever had to do e.g. Q&A with a very distressed 5 year old: "When I get to Heaven how will I find my Mummy?" and I would reply "Don't worry - she'll find you."
34. Throughout succeeding years I received a lot of support from my extended family.

Impact: my children

35. My children knew that she was unwell but they had no inkling that she was dying. They saw her turning yellow. They saw that she was confined to bed at home for an increasing amount of time and that the bed was eventually moved into the front room. Then in the summer of 1979, they understood that their mother had to spend several weeks in hospital.

36. One of my abiding memories is them waving her off in an ambulance on her final journey – oblivious to the seriousness of the situation. She died in the early hours of Friday 25 January 1980. I broke the news to them on the same day after school. The 7 year old could grasp the finality of death but the 5 year old couldn't and kept expecting her to turn up. Later we also had to have a conversation about cremation. I always believed in being open with them but have spared them the gory details e.g. the "Sengstacken Tube". They always knew the cause of death. I explained that your body was like a pair of pyjamas and when you died you simply took them off.
37. My sons were deprived of a loving, maternal, responsible and educated mother (she had been a primary school teacher) and consequently led a somewhat less comfortable life than many of their peers. Fortunately, they have both gone on to graduate and enjoy extremely successful careers.

Education/ work/ financial effects

38. There was no impact on my wife's education as the illness occurred later in life.
39. My wife had not worked since just before she had our first child. We were both happy for her to stay at home and to look after the kids. The expectation was that she would resume part-time work as a teacher or lab technician after both children started school. The illness prevented this.
40. Financially the effect was devastating: it was like a torpedo through the ship. Neither my wife nor our mortgage (at a time of double-figure interest rates) were insured or, post diagnosis, insurable against her death.
41. After meeting substantial funeral expenses, I was faced with having to support three of us on one income until my sons had left university. I

also had to hire and pay help to collect my sons from school, feed them, do the cleaning, ironing and minding, whilst I was at work. We were deprived of the opportunity to be a two-income family.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

42. As far as I can recall neither my wife nor I sought or were offered counselling.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

43. My "Family Allowance" was uprated to reflect my single parent status. At the time there was no male equivalent of the "Widow's Pension".

44. Neither my wife nor I received any payments from any trusts or funds.

Section 8. Other Issues

45. The reason I have provided this statement is because I read something about infected blood transfusions following childbirth and it made me think, "what if?" As you will appreciate, I have not the slightest idea whether my wife's illness and subsequent death were or were not the result of the introduction into her system of infected blood. All I know is that she was perfectly healthy, had blood transfusions after 2 births and after the second one was never healthy again.

46. I am in the process, so far without success, of trying to obtain any relevant medical records which may be extant. At present the only documentation I possess is the Death Certificate (**WITN0288002**).

47. I wish to make clear that I am not criticising anybody. I am sure that the people who treated my wife did their best. I do, however, feel that I owe it to her, our sons and other people who may or may not have been infected to furnish the Inquiry with such facts as I possess, which may or

may not be a relevant piece of what, I assume, is a very large and complicated jigsaw puzzle.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated *30th January 2019.*