

08 FEB 2019

Witness Name: Laura Megan Ryan

Statement No.: WITN0648001

Exhibits: **WITN0648002**

Dated: 8th January 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LAURA MEGAN RYAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 7th December 2018.

I, Laura Megan Ryan, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Laura Megan Ryan. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958. My address is known to the Inquiry. I intend to speak about how I was infected with Hepatitis B through blood transfusions I was given at British Military Hospitals in Germany. I cleared the infection soon after I was diagnosed. However, as I was pregnant when I received the transfusions, my son, Robert Ryan, was also infected with Hepatitis B. We did not find out about this until Robert was about 18 years old.
2. Robert is my only child and I am divorced from Robert's father, Christopher Ryan ("Kris"). Robert received treatment for Hepatitis B

when he was about 19 years old and, although it reduced his viral load, it did not clear the infection.

3. Robert is now married and has three sons, GRO-C I moved to Darlington in 2015 so that I could be there to support Robert and his family if he becomes unwell.

Section 2. How Infected

4. Around October 1979, I moved to Soest, Germany to work as a barmaid for the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI). I met Kris, who was serving in the army, about a month after I arrived.
5. Kris and I married in November 1980 and we found out that I was pregnant in March 1981. I started losing weight early on in my pregnancy and, following tests, we found out I had anaemia. I was admitted to British Military Hospital Iserlohn ("BMH Iserlohn") for a few days in June so that I could be given plasma. I cannot be sure of the exact date.
6. A few weeks later, my haemoglobin levels were still low so I went back to BMH Iserlohn for a full blood transfusion. I spent approximately two weeks in hospital and I remember being given the transfusion on the day of Prince Charles and Princess Diana's wedding, 29 July 1981. I was given four pints of blood. I do not know whether the blood was from Germany or sent over from the United Kingdom.
7. The transfusion was effective for a while but, by September, my haemoglobin levels were low again. I went back to BMH Iserlohn for approximately two weeks and received another full blood transfusion in the third week of September. I was again given four pints of blood.
8. On 1 October 1981, Chris and I moved from Soest to Bunde. I was admitted to British Military Hospital Münster on 5 October 1981 for a blood

absorption test to work out why my haemoglobin levels kept falling. The results essentially showed that Robert had been taking all of the goodness out of my blood.

9. Robert was born on GRO-C 1981 at British Military Hospital Rinteln ("BMH Rinteln"). Following the birth, my haemoglobin levels fell again as the doctors had failed to close one of my veins. I was operated on later on in the day of the birth and was put on a saline drip. I was given a further blood transfusion either the second or third day after Robert's birth
10. About a week after I was discharged from BMH Rinteln. Approximately 2 weeks later I had a visit from the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association ("SSAFA"). My body had been itchy for a couple of days before the visit and the SSAFA representative told me that my skin and the whites of my eyes looked yellow. She was concerned I was jaundiced and so I was sent back to BMH Rinteln within a couple of hours.
11. They did tests at BMH Rinteln and told me that I had Hepatitis B. They intimated that I had probably been infected through the blood transfusions I had received and that it was most likely from the transfusion in July 1981, given the incubation period would have been approximately six months.
12. I spent approximately 7 days as an inpatient at BMH Rinteln and Robert was in there with me the whole time. I was given multivitamins at the hospital but was given no other medication or treatment. The doctors told me that there was nothing else they could do and they seemed to think that the infection would cure itself.
13. After I was informed that I had Hepatitis B, I clearly remember three doctors came into the room and stood at the end of my bed discussing Robert and I. One asked if they should remove my baby from me to avoid infection. I remember this vividly because straight away I thought nobody is taking my baby off me. Another doctor asked if the baby needed testing

to see if he had it and the third doctor replied that he would be fine as I was breastfeeding. It was therefore decided that Robert would stay with me.

14. When I was discharged from BMH Rinteln, I was no longer yellow and itchy. Obviously my body had fought it off. However, I feel I was not given adequate information about the infection and I do not recall being given any medication or advice when I left. The doctors at the hospital may have mentioned the risk of transmission but I do not specifically recall being advised about this. For instance, I do not remember being told that the infection could be passed on through sexual intercourse or cuts.

15. Towards the end of 1982, about 12 months after I was diagnosed, I went back to BMH Rinteln for blood tests and I was told I had cleared the infection.

16. We returned to the United Kingdom at the end of 1985 when Robert was 4 years old. Kris and I separated shortly after this. Robert initially lived with me in Stoke but then moved up north to live with Kris when he was 14 years old.

17. When Robert was 18 years old, I had an appointment at my GP practice and saw a new GP. The GP looked through my notes and saw that I had previously had Hepatitis B. He asked whether Robert had ever been tested and I told him that he had not. The GP called the infectious disease people while I was still there and they advised that Robert should be tested. I contacted Chris who took Robert to the doctors to get tested. That was when we found out that Robert had been infected with Hepatitis B since birth.

18. As far as we are aware, Robert had never been tested before this. No one had ever mentioned to us that there was a possibility that Robert could have been infected. None of my previous GPs had picked up on it. I had

been reassured by what the doctors had said at BMH Rinteln and we never noticed Robert to have any health issues. Mentally and physically, he developed as normal.

Section 3. Other Infections

19. As far as I am aware, I did not receive any infection other than Hepatitis B from the blood transfusions.

Section 4. Consent

20. As far as I am aware, Robert and I were not tested or treated without our knowledge or consent or for research purposes.

Section 5. Impact

21. Before we found out that Robert was also infected, the mental and physical effects on me were mainly limited to the time I spent at BMH Rinteln. They had treated me appallingly, I suppose it was due to ignorance. I was completely isolated and they treated me as though I was going to infect all of Germany. When I first arrived, they walked me down a long corridor and took me to the farthest room away from everyone else. It was a room for four or six people but I was on my own. I was not allowed to use the toilet and had to use a cardboard bedpan that they would disinfect as they were worried about me contaminating the sewerage. When my food came, they would put the tray on the floor and pass it around the door because they did not want to come into the room with me. I did not get the magazine and sweet trolley that used to come around every day. As I had been rushed to hospital, I had not had an opportunity to bring anything with me so it was a very boring and lonely time. For the first day or two, I had to wash Robert's clothes in the sink. It was not a pleasant experience and it made me feel isolated and unclean.

22. I do remember one male nurse at BMH Rinteln who was nice to me and would visit me. He looked after Robert for me one night so I could get some sleep. From what I can recall, it was him who told me that I would have been infected through the blood transfusion but I felt he was probably going out on a limb by telling me this. I also remember a nurse doing her thesis on me, she said I was the most interesting case in there at that time.
23. After I was discharged from BMH Rinteln, we carried on as normal. As I had cleared the infection, I did not suffer from any long-term physical effects.
24. After I was diagnosed, I would mention that I had previously had Hepatitis B when I attended medical and dental appointments. Between 1997 and 2004 recall having a medical appointment to have a mole removed from my foot, which was scheduled for 1pm; however, I ended up waiting until 5pm to be seen. When I asked why it had taken so long, I was told that because I had Hepatitis B they had to clean everything down after my appointment so it was easier for me to be seen last. I did not understand why they had not just told me this earlier so I could have gone out rather than sit there waiting for hours. It was frustrating considering I was given the all clear 30 years ago. I have had many blood tests since I was cleared and it has never shown up. Because of this incident, I no longer tell people that I had Hepatitis B unless I am asked.
25. Although I was not seriously affected by my own infection, my life was significantly impacted after we found out that Robert also had Hepatitis B. I knew that I had infected my son and so I blamed myself, as did Robert for a while. It was probably good that he was living with his dad at the time otherwise he may have taken it out on me.
26. When I found out about Robert, mentally, I had a very bad year. I was living in Stoke at the time and was travelling up to North Yorkshire

regularly so I could go with Robert to his appointments. When he had his liver biopsy, I was with him by his bedside all day.

27. Robert started treatment soon after he was diagnosed. The treatment was called Interferon Alpha. He had to inject himself three times a week for six months.
28. The side effects of the treatment were horrendous. Robert had flu-like symptoms after every injection. The day after an injection, he would spend all day in bed and there was only about one day a week that he would feel okay. I remember we visited my brother in Portsmouth for a week and it was horrible seeing how ill Robert was. We were meant to be on holiday but he spent most of the time in bed.
29. Robert was only about 19 years old when he received the treatment and I worried at the time that he was not strong enough to get through it. However, he completed the treatment and did not drink alcohol during that period which I thought was really good for someone of his age.
30. Although Robert completed the treatment and it reduced his viral load, it had not cleared the infection. There was no further treatment available at the time. However, Robert's consultant, who was one of the best in the country, told us to keep coming to see him in case new treatments were developed.
31. Around this time, I spoke to Robert's consultant to ask what the prognosis was. He told me that if Robert did not drink alcohol, he had about 30 – 40 years to live but if he did drink alcohol, he only had about 20 – 30 years. It was very difficult to hear this and it made me think that Robert would probably die before me. I spent a lot of time in bed crying.
32. I think, after the treatment did not work, Robert just thought "stuff it". He stopped going to see his consultant and started drinking alcohol. Given

what Robert's consultant had told me, I became concerned that Robert was shortening his life by drinking. Every time I would visit him in North Yorkshire, there would be a BBQ or night out and I would have to watch him drinking. I did pull his friends aside at one point to say, please stop pouring him drink. I assumed they would have known that Robert had Hepatitis B but he had not told them and so I broke Robert's trust by telling them.

33. I worry about how the infection has impacted Robert's life. When he was younger, he wanted to join the Royal Air Force but he was not able to due to having Hepatitis B. Every time he got a new girlfriend, he had to tell them that he was infected so they could be vaccinated. When Robert's sons were born, they also had to be vaccinated.

34. In 2014, I went to Leeming Bar to visit Robert over Christmas and Robert's wife told me she was concerned that his health was deteriorating. He was a really bad colour and, just by looking at him, I could see why she was concerned. I took Robert out on Boxing Day to speak with him and asked him to make an appointment with his consultant since he had not seen him for a while. I pointed out that he has kids now and needed to be aware of what was going on.

35. This was about 15 years after Robert's diagnosis and I knew he had done a lot of drinking. I was worried he was nearing the 20-year life span. I thought if this is going to be the beginning of the end for him, I want to be there for it. I was worried it would be a long drawn out affair and thought they would need all the help they could get with the kids.

36. I asked Robert what he thought of me moving to Darlington and he agreed it was a good idea so I moved up in October 2015. I had to leave my whole life behind in Stoke. My mother, who is now 82, lives in Stoke. I had a house that was paid for and a good job as a manager of a shop. I had previously been a Local Councillor and would have stood again. I had a

good circle of friends. Mentally I was in a good place. I had to give all of this up and had no job to come to in Darlington. Before moving, I had to spend a lot of time and money travelling between Stoke and Darlington trying to find a flat. Most of my savings went on the move as I had to pay the solicitors approximately £3,500.

37. Although I did not suffer any financial, educational or work-related issues as a result of myself being infected, my finances and work-life have been impacted by moving to Darlington to support Robert. I have had two jobs since moving to Darlington but neither of these worked out. In January 2017 I decided to open my own shop but I had to give this up after a year as it was not making enough money. I was living off £52 a week while I was running the shop and, after I lost it, I had to go on the dole. I am currently looking for a new job but, physically, I can no longer work in retail as I have arthritis. I know where the food banks are if I need to use them. Although I have been in Darlington for three and half years now, I have nothing behind me. It is difficult to be in this situation after having worked for 40 years.

38. The most difficult thing, however, has been watching Robert go through all of this. He has reduced his drinking but he has not seen his consultant for a couple of years, despite me encouraging him to make an appointment. He does seem to be living his life; he plays darts and has joined a pool team. However, he is my son, my only child, and I worry a lot about him. He is very quiet and does not speak to anyone, even his wife, about the infection. It makes me wonder what is going on in his mind and what affect it is having on him, especially now with all this male suicide awareness. I feel I cannot talk to him about it as I worry that if I keep bringing it to the front of his mind, it might bring him to it.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

39. Robert and I have never been offered any counselling or psychological support in relation to us being infected.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

40. Robert and I have never received any financial assistance as a consequence of being infected. No one has ever advised us about any Trusts or Funds and we did not know that there was any financial support available.

Section 8. Other Issues

41. I have provided my maternity booklet, which is **attached as "Exhibit WITN0648002"**. The booklet provides some of the dates and details of the blood transfusions I received.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____ L. M. Ryan _____

GRO-C

Dated 02/02/2019