

Witness Name: Mark Donnelly
Statement No:WITN2609001
Dated: 6th March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARK DONNELLY

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry rules 2006 dated 12th December 2018. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I, Mark Donnelly will say as follows:-

1.Introduction

1. My name is Mark Donnelly. My date of birth is GRO-C 1980 and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I intend to speak about my Father, Peter Donnelly, and his infection of HIV which he contracted in 1985 through receiving contaminated blood products, subsequently leading to his death in 1989. In particular I intend to speak of the nature of my Father's infection and how the illness impacted me and my family.

2.How Infected

1. As I was born in 1980 and my father was infected in 1985 it is difficult for me to speak exactly to how my Father was infected. My Father worked as a store

clerk and suffered from severe haemophilia A. As part of his treatment for the illness, my Mother routinely administered Factor VIII and Factor IX clotting injections within the family home, whilst this was suspected to be the cause of his infection, the truth is sadly unknown.

3. Other infections

1. As far as I was aware, the only infection my Father contracted at this time was HIV; however, upon receipt of his medical records in light of the Inquiry, it has come to my attention he suffered from non-A non-B hepatitis and considerable liver dysfunction. I am unaware of how he contracted either of these ailments.

4. Consent

1. I am not aware of my Father ever being treated without his knowledge. When my Father was diagnosed with the disease, I was, to some degree, shielded from the very fact of his illness given my age.

5. Impact

1. Sickness was my Father's normality, or rather the normality which I remember. I often hear my older brothers tell stories of my Father, a man it seems, I never had the privilege of truly knowing. My Father's illness was extremely tasking on his mental health, transforming him from a healthy man, heavily involved within the community who frequently socialised playing darts, into much of a recluse. I remember countless trophies within my childhood home, but I do not remember my Father ever socialising.
2. Physically, my Father was constantly sick. The latter part of my Father's life was spent in and out of hospital forcing me to spend much of my time with my relatives. I remember as a 7-year-old child bringing my Father tablets in bed as my mother started work early in the mornings and my Father was much too

ill to work. I can never remember my Father working as he was always too ill, leaving the family in a constant state of financial difficulty.

3. The effects of my Father's illness were not solely confined to him; rather it tore my family apart. After my Father was diagnosed with HIV my brother, Paul, who is substantially older than me, went to University in Belfast. I can't recall Paul coming home often at weekends.

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GRO-C An illness which unfortunately, at the time, was portrayed by the media as a disease only affecting the gay community. In the 1980's, homosexuality was frowned upon by society, especially here in the north of Ireland.

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4. My Father's illness and death took a lot out of my Mother, becoming manically depressed, she began to drink very heavily. I remember from a young age my Mother blaming herself for my Father's death, crying as she said, "I put poison in his veins." The grief and knowledge that she, herself, was most probably the person who injected my Father with the contaminated Factor VIII, was ultimately too much for her. I often came home from school to find my Mother drunk, which led me to shout at her; this was a position someone of my age should not have been put in. It became a dread to have to come home from school so I would often stay out at friend's houses after school so as to stay out as late as possible. Ultimately my Mother's addiction broke the family paradigm to a larger degree as my brothers Paul (in Belfast) and Shaun (in USA) stopped calling my Mother as often as would be expected in a normal mother/son relationship.

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GRO-D At different times in the years before my Mother's death, she would, whilst drunk, blame Paul for not coming to Armagh and for not allowing her to see her grandchildren as much as she would like. My Mother would ultimately blame my brother's wife for this situation. The main cause of the breakdown in the relationship was my Mother's alcohol dependency. My Mother was prone to nasty and hurtful outbursts fuelled by her addiction to such an extent

that at one stage my brother's wife barred my Mother from seeing her grandchildren. My Mother died of an ulcer in 2000 as a result of her drinking; this was undoubtedly fuelled by her grief and self-loathing stemming from her perceived part in my Father's death. To this day, the family paradigm remains fractured and strained as I and none of my siblings have what would be classed as a normal sibling relationship.

5. Shortly after my Father was diagnosed with HIV we moved from our family home of 10 years to a new house; whilst I was never told by my parents this was due to the illness I often felt that one of the main reasons for the move was the fear that the local community would find out about my Father's illness. This feeling is exacerbated when contextualised as we, a Catholic family, moved to a Protestant area in the height of the troubles. Prior to 1989, we lived in a large **GRO-C** housing estate in Armagh of some 300+ houses. We then moved to a row of 10 cottages in the countryside **GRO-C**
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- GRO-C** Moving to a new house, in a new area **GRO-C** to avoid stigma or the news of my Father's illness from spreading was, in my opinion, simply a priority in my parents thinking.

6. Further to this, my parents refused to tell even extended family the truth of my Father's illness such was the misunderstanding of HIV at that time and the activities HIV had become synonymous with. I can vividly recall the day I was told that my Father had passed away. We were, at that time, living at my aunt's house as our own house was in the middle of renovation works. That morning, I was in my cousin's house next door, having stayed there the previous night. I was told that my Mother wanted me down in my aunt's house. When I arrived to my aunts, I found my Mother sitting in the kitchen, with my aunt. It was then that she told me that my Father had died during the night. After her conversation with me, she broke down and I remember her turning to my aunt and asking her, "what do I tell people happened to him?" My Aunt advised her to tell people he had cancer. Even at the young age of

9, the age my own son is now coincidentally, I knew something was strange about this question. It would not be until I was 16 that my Mother would tell me the truth of my Father's death.

7. I often think of my Father when I make memories with my own children. It's the small things which any Father and child should have the opportunity to experience such as a Father teaching their child to ride a bike. I feel that many experiences like this were robbed from me and my Father. I remember when I first began to play football, my Father was quite ill at the time but insisted he brought me to my first training session at a local club which he had been heavily involved with at committee level through the years. My Father was reluctant to get out of the car, perhaps to avoid any casual conversation. He simply shouted out of his window to the trainer to enrol me and stayed in the car, waiting on me and watching me play. This memory has vividly stuck with me throughout my life as that was the one and only time my Father took me to training. Memories such as this remind me that my children were robbed of a chance to meet either of the grandparents.
8. I remember playing in the family bathroom as a child when I accidentally cut myself on my Father's razor. Unsurprisingly this sparked major panic within the household in fear that I may have contracted my Father's illness. I don't remember ever being tested for HIV, but I remember my parents had an ensuite, which they financially couldn't afford, installed to ensure my safety. It is only in recent years looking back at my childhood where I can clearly make these links, understanding fully how my Father's infection dominated domestic life.
9. I often consider would my life have been different if my Father had of been alive. My two elder brothers both went on to achieve third level qualifications whilst I chose to become a tradesman. Whilst I am happy with my chosen path, the only discerning factor I can identify owing to our difference in life choices is my lack of a Father figure. My Mother attempted to ensure that I received the best education possible, however, I was always rebellious and acted out, a trait I feel my Father would have quashed. Shortly before the

death of my Mother, I met my now wife. Over the years she and her family have guided me and helped me through life and played a role in my life which I was missing. A role which should ultimately have been the job of my own parents, if not for the decision taken by someone, at some point, to purchase cheap blood products from places such as US prisons.

6. Treatment/Care Support

1. Neither I nor my family were ever offered any counselling or psychological support to help us through my Father's infection or death. I feel that counselling would have been extremely necessary following my Father's death to help deal with my Mother's addiction, but no such aid was ever made available.

7. Financial Assistance

1. To my knowledge my family received no financial assistance throughout my Father's illness or in the wake of his death.
2. This is a point of contention between me and my brothers. On my 18th birthday I received a check for £20,000 in the mail. My Mother had previously told me that £16,000 was put in a high interest Trust Fund for me and was a gift from my Father. She also told me on a number of occasions over the years that the money was my Father's money from the sale of their house in Coventry in the late 1970's. I was told the money was put in a Trust for me by my Father as he would not be alive to see me grow up. I have difficulties with this story as my Mother struggled immensely with money following my Father's death and the Trust merely allowed her to access the interest of this money for my education, rather than the principle sum. An example of when my Mother accessed the interest was to pay to send me to Grammar School as a border, as, at the age of 11, I failed my 11+ and my Mother did not want me to have to attend the local high school which had a bad reputation. My brothers contend this money was a pay out from a legal challenge against the Government (something my Mother never mentioned to me in all the years we

lived under the one roof), yet I was the only one out of the 3 siblings and a widow to receive any money. My Father passed away in August 1989 and to my knowledge the British Government had made no payments to victims of infected blood prior to this date.

8. Other Issues

1. I have never been legally represented nor has any other member of my family attempted to bring a claim in respect of my father's infection.
2. I have been asked if I would like to put any questions to the Inquiry. How can something like this have happened? Do they know where the infected blood came from? Were my father's files and medical records deleted in the knowledge of his infection? I attempted to obtain my father's medical records from his GP in light of the Inquiry and they were not on file despite being registered there for years and my mother's records still being present.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

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Dated

12/3/19