

Witness Name: Linda Mcrae MacDonald (or Strachan)

Statement No.: WITN3602001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 11 January 2023

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LINDA MCRAE MACDONALD OR STRACHAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 23 December 2022.

I, Linda McRae MacDonald or Strachan, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Linda McRae MacDonald or Strachan. My date of birth is GRO-C GRO-C 1947 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am qualified as a Registered General Nurse and a Registered Children's Nurse (RGN, RSCN). I retired 12 years ago from the post of Senior Health Adviser and HIV counsellor for Forth Valley Health Board. I was married to the late John Buchan Strachan, date of birth GRO-C 1944. We have one son together, Robert Iain Crawford Strachan, date of birth GRO-C 1978. John died on 23 October 1987 at age 40. I intend to speak about my late husband and how he was infected by contaminated blood. In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment received and the impact it had on him and our lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

2. My husband suffered from Haemophilia A which was diagnosed when he was around 2 years old. His condition was very severe as he had no clotting Factor VIII. In 1970, my husband contracted Hepatitis B from cryoprecipitate. They originally thought he would die from this as his blood tests were so severe, but he recovered completely with treatment, much to our relief. In retrospect, that should have rung alarm bells in my head. In the early years of our marriage, my husband was treated with cryoprecipitate. This was done by transfusion at the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary by Dr Dawson and Dr Bennett, Consultant Haematologist and Senior Registrar respectively. On or around 1980, a concentrate Factor VIII medication was introduced. We initially thought this was a wonderful breakthrough as John could administer this at home himself by intravenous injection, rather than attending hospital for treatment. I would say my husband administered the Factor VIII medication approximately once a month.
3. There was no advice tendered to John about the risk of being exposed to infection by using blood products. My husband attended Aberdeen Royal Infirmary regularly and he always attended on his own, but I know he would have told me had they advised him of any risks.
4. My husband was infected with Hepatitis B (HBV) in 1970 by using cryoprecipitate. He was also infected with HIV likely from a contaminated batch of Factor VIII. I do not know when exactly my husband contracted HIV. I do not remember ever being given batch numbers.
5. At some point in 1984, my husband was tested for HIV. It was at least six months after the test when John was told he had HIV. It should not have taken so long to be informed of the diagnosis. I believe it was Dr GRO-D who told John the news. He was given no information about the infection, and how to manage it at the time. The risk of infection ought to have been explained prior to providing the blood products. Dr GRO-D

also should have told John to bring somebody to his appointment knowing that he was going to deliver such devastating news. They never told John about any risk of others being infected due to his own infection. It is possible this was due to the sheer ignorance of the time, in that nobody really knew about HIV and how to treat it. It meant that we had to do a lot of research ourselves. When I found out about the diagnosis, I remember thinking I had never seen my husband so distraught and angry. He felt he had put both myself and our son at risk. He completely withdrew from us.

Section 3. Other Infections

6. From diagnosis, my husband's health deteriorated significantly. The HIV infection seriously affected John's immune system, which resulted in him being subject to all sorts of bacterial infections. He would have bleeds in his joints, particularly his elbows and knees were extremely painful. John would constantly have oral thrush in his mucous membrane. He had kidney problems, certainly due to damage from the earlier cryoprecipitate treatment. By early 1987, my husband developed constant diarrhoea and dehydration which was possibly due to an anti-inflammatory drug which led to chronic renal failure. When he went into renal failure, a shunt was inserted which got infected. There was certainly a knock on effect on his health from the original infection. Being HIV positive exacerbated all his problems and he developed infections constantly.

Section 4. Consent

7. My husband was tested for HIV in 1984. I am certain they did this without consent. He could not have given his consent as I am sure he didn't know about the test. I have no idea why he was tested, especially without our knowledge or at least my husband's knowledge. As his kidney functions were being monitored, I assume that his blood would have

been taken regularly so they could have used that for testing, but I do not know for sure when or how they tested John.

Section 5. Impact

8. Due to ill health, eventually my husband had to give up work which took an awful strain on our financial situation as we had a mortgage. He was never able to acquire life insurance as the premiums were so high we couldn't afford it. I nursed my husband at home most of the time whilst also trying to earn a living. His personality definitely changed and life became more difficult. My husband developed septicaemia and died on 23 October 1987 in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. I can honestly say having to tell our 8-year-old son that his Dad was going to die the night before was the most terrible experience of my life. I knew for about six months that the prognosis was extremely poor. It wasn't a matter of if, just when. You start to grieve but it still feels like a knife in the stomach when it does happen.

9. The infection and my husband's death had an enormous impact on our son and I. We had to face the awful stigma associated with HIV status. A year after John's death, I developed some health problems which resulted in me having to go for surgery. When taking bloods prior to surgery, I distinctly remember I informed the doctor about my medical history and that of my late husband's HIV status. Although I told him I had been tested negative for HIV, he ran out of the room, refused to take my blood and sent a nurse to do it. His fear was immense. Of course, the doctor's reaction was horrifying to me. One can only imagine how that felt. I remember all the media hype and pictures of tombstones on the television when they discussed HIV. There was also an occasion information was shared by a so-called friend who worked in the local GP surgery. To top it off, the Haemophilia society at the time let me down very badly, as they published the fact that an HIV positive Haemophilia patient had died that week. It didn't take much for people to work it out as we lived in a small village. Two years after John's death, I made the

decision to move to another area, uprooting my son away from his paternal grandparents and all his friends. Thankfully, we had support from my parents.

10. I still feel the ongoing traumatic effects today and reliving this doesn't help when I feel as though this should have been dealt with years ago.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

11. We were never given any help or counselling. There was an awful lot of ignorance regarding HIV, even in the medical fraternity. Prognosis and treatment were never discussed and I even had to request that I be tested as it was never considered. Thankfully, I was negative.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

12. In 1990, my son and I received an *ex gratia* payment from the MacFarlane Trust of £30,250 each. I was in the process of taking legal action when the MacFarlane trust was formed. I remember I signed a document to accept the money instead of proceeding with litigation. More recently in December 2022, I was surprised to receive a payment of £100,000 from the Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme. I will also receive £1,800 from the Scheme by way of monthly payments.

13. I remember seeing on the news that there was to be an inquiry into the infected blood which caused John's death. I was surprised as I thought there would be no further action after the Penrose Inquiry. In my opinion the outcome of that was a total whitewash. It was my son, Robert, who discovered on social media that I had to be registered with a support scheme in order to receive financial assistance. The process of applying for financial assistance was very straightforward after my initial phone call. I was sent all the necessary forms which I completed and sent off along with the marriage and death certificates. I was treated with respect,

sensitivity and politeness by the support scheme staff. I would say the biggest obstacle was the lack of information about any support scheme.

Section 8. Other Issues

14. I was involved in the earlier litigation regarding contaminated blood on or around 1990. I had originally instructed a firm in Aberdeen, Philip, Gauld and Kemp. I had a statement taken at that time, but it transpired it was never submitted. In the early stages of litigation, the MacFarlane Trust presented me a settlement offer without any admission of guilt. I felt that we were being cast aside and that I had no choice but to accept what was on offer.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

15th January 2023