

Witness Name: Alison Ramsey
Statement No.: WITN4506010
Exhibits: WITN4506011 - WITN4506025
Dated: May 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

SUPPLEMENTARY WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ALISON RAMSEY

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 8 April 2021, which I received on 23 April 2021. I am grateful for the agreed extension to 5 May 2021.

I, Alison Ramsey, will say as follows: -

At paragraph 9 of WITN4506001, regarding your role, you state that you are the nominated budget holder within NWSSP for the WIBSS budget. Please explain what this role entails. How does your position affect the operations of and payments made by the WIBSS?

1. Please note that following my October 2020 statement submission [WITN4506001], on 10 December 2020 I was promoted to the role of Director of Planning, Performance, and Informatics within NWSSP. I have however retained responsibility for WIBSS and there has been no change to my WIBSS role.
2. I line manager the WIBSS Manager Mary Swiffen-Walker. I meet with her on a monthly 1:1 basis to offer supervision and support in her role.

3. I also meet with Mary Swiffen-Walker to discuss any new WIBSS applications or change in status of existing beneficiaries.
4. I approve applications to WIBSS based on initial recommendations made by the WIBSS Manager. And I approve payments over the delegated limit of the WIBSS Manager which is £10k. Payments greater than £80k would require the approval of the NWSSP Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Andy Butler.
5. I attend the Governance Group meetings.
6. I approve the submission of the forecast WIBSS expenditure to Welsh Government for approval, as prepared by NWSSP finance colleagues.

At paragraph 10 of WITN4506001, you note that as part of the training for your position you attended a handover meeting with Martin Riley. Do you recall what was discussed at this meeting? What information were you given about the role?

7. We discussed the background to WIBSS, and its establishment. At the time of my joining NWSSP, the WIBSS was well established and into smooth day to day running. Martin Riley explained the recent change of introducing the Enhanced Stage 1 payments and ran through the different members of the team and their roles. He also explained the role of the Governance Group. He referenced the recently completed Internal Audit review. He set out the intention to recruit a psychology team, funding for which had recently been approved by Welsh Government.
8. The WIBSS Manager is the same person in post since the start of WIBSS, and the same continuity exists within the WIBSS Welfare Support team. Mary Swiffen-Walker ran through with me the Welsh Government Directions relating to WIBSS, the content of the website, the application process and appeals process.

9. Martin Riley still works for the NHS in Wales and has always offered his assistance if I were to need any advice or clarity on matters that predated my time with the scheme which others in the WIBSS team were unable to recall or answer.

At paragraph 28 of WITN4506001, regarding the WIBSS locating beneficiaries, you state that you are unable to consider whether more could have been done by WIBSS to locate beneficiaries as this occurred before your tenure.

During your tenure, were you made aware of any steps taken by WIBSS to locate additional beneficiaries?

10. Leaflets about the service were issued to haemophilia centres in Wales by WIBSS in the summer of 2019.
11. In February 2021, a leaflet about the WIBSS service was sent electronically to all GP practices in Wales. We intend to issue hard copies of the leaflet once GP practice premises re-open post the pandemic constraints, and we will revise it to reflect the changes because of the parity announcement on 25th March 2021. A copy of this leaflet is attached [WITN450611].

At paragraph 30 of WITN4506001, you state that ‘the WIBSS team has raised with the Welsh Government Policy lead the increasing concerns raised in general terms with us by beneficiaries about the lack of parity between the rates paid across the four nations’. Please specify, giving examples, the concerns raised by beneficiaries as to lack of parity between the rates paid across the four devolved schemes and the Welsh Government’s response.

12. We have made Catherine Cody of Welsh Government aware of the common themes to the concerns raised; these include:
- Needing to seek updates on progress in deciding about parity.
 - Expressing frustration that a decision is taking so long.

- Unhappiness that as individuals who are on the WIBSS scheme but now live in other parts of the UK, they are receiving less than those on other schemes who could potentially be living in the same town/street.
- Unfairness that those on WIBSS are being treated differently.

13. The matter of parity has been a standing item on the Governance Group agenda, and Catherine Cody of Welsh Government would provide a latest update at these meetings. In 2020, Welsh Government did write to WIBSS beneficiaries and separately to widows to provide them with an update.

14. Copies of both these letters are attached [WITN4506012] and [WITN4506013].

15. As per my previous statement the introduction of the psychology team has more recently allowed us to offer an additional level of support to beneficiaries. The team raised that in their consultations with those accessing the service, the issue of parity also came up. We discussed this at the Governance Group and agreed that Dr Caroline Coffey, Consultant Clinical Psychologist would write to the Welsh Government to highlight the impact of parity expressed by the beneficiaries.

16. A copy of this letter is attached [WITN4506014].

At paragraph 41 of WITN4506001, you explain that WIBSS regularly informs the Welsh Government Finance Team regarding forecasted expenditure and uses this system to flag emerging concerns on the call for discretionary support.

Please specify what, if any, emerging concerns about discretionary support have been raised with the Welsh Government Finance team.

17. There have been no areas of emerging concerns to date about discretionary support to flag to the Welsh Government.

18. In the event there were concerns in future, we would use the system of submitting forecast expenditure plans to flag any concerns and seek a discussion to resolve.

At paragraph 87 of WITN4506001, you stated that Welsh Government consulted with the other devolved administrations and the Welsh Blood Service and responded that the position was that Anti-D was considered safe and not a possible route of infection for Hepatitis C. Please provide the Inquiry with the advice you received from Welsh Government.

19. Please find attached document relating to this matter [WITN4506015].

At paragraph 90 of WITN4506001, you note that when determining an application, there is a requirement for an applicant to have evidence of receipt of blood/blood products in their medical records. In paragraph 92 you gave an indication of steps the WIBSS might take if an applicant has been unable to provide the required evidence. What approach would WIBSS take in the following specific circumstances:

- a. If the medical records have been lost or destroyed;**
- b. If the medical records are incomplete;**
- c. If the medical records are otherwise unavailable through no fault of the applicant;**
- d. Where there is evidence of poor record keeping such that there is a reasonable suspicion that a record of the use of blood/blood products would not have been made; and**
- e. Where there is evidence that the procedure carried out would ordinarily require blood/blood products despite there being no such record.**

20. In the specific circumstances a – d, we would take the action set out in paragraph 92 of **WITN4506001**.

21. The Welfare rights Team would contact the Digital Health and Care Wales (formally NWIS) and ask them to check clinical coding, to try to obtain the necessary evidence of a transfusion. Clinical coding is the use of standardised

statistical codes to transform descriptions of medical diagnoses or procedures to produce a medical classification. Digital Health and Care Wales manage the Patient Episode Database of Wales (PEDW). PEDW records all episodes on inpatient and day case activity in NHS Wales hospitals.

22. In the circumstances set out in e, we would seek a medical opinion whether the specific medical procedure referred to in any notes or other evidence provided would, on the balance of probabilities, require a blood transfusion to have taken place. If the medical opinion supports the view that it was more likely than not, that a transfusion would have taken place, we will usually approve the application. We treat each application on its merit.

At paragraph 106 of WITN4506001, regarding the Welsh Government review of regular discretionary payments, you state that review is on hold pending the outcome of discussions on parity of payments across the four nations. Can you provide further details regarding the chronology of this review - When did the Welsh Government review of discretionary payments begin? How long has the review been on hold for? When was the review set to finish before being put on hold? When is the review due to finish?

23. When WIBSS received the dataset in October 2017 with details of those beneficiaries to transfer from the Alliance House Organisations (AHOs), we noted that 25 of WIBSS beneficiaries were in receipt of regular discretionary payments from the AHOs.

24. Consequently, we have continued to make these payments to the individuals until such time that the Welsh Government was able to review whether an Income top-up scheme was required. This was to ensure that no-one would be any worse off following the transfer.

25. I am not aware that a formal review was commenced by Welsh Government. I am only aware that no further decision on regular discretionary payments would be made until the outcome of discussions on parity of payments across the four

nations was agreed. These discussions have been progressing for some time leading to an announcement on 25 March 2021.

26. Since the announcement about parity, we are waiting on Welsh Government to issue the latest WIBSS Directions. We have asked for clarity on whether any further decision on the regular discretionary payments will be clarified as part of this.

At paragraph 130 of WITN4506001, you refer to a WIBSS internal audit completed in 2018-19. Please provide the Inquiry with a copy of their internal audit.

27. A copy of the internal audit report is attached [WITN4506016].

At paragraph 142 of WITN4506001, you note that the availability of other sources of support to beneficiaries may be taken into account when determining eligibility and the level of support offered by WIBSS, depending on the nature of the application.

Please provide further examples of types of application that would be affected by the availability of other sources of support. How would the availability of other sources of support affect the applications? Is the relationship between other sources of support and applications explained to the beneficiaries or via any written guidance?

28. If WIBSS receives a request for support, we would ask whether the funding was available from anywhere else. We state on our website that 'dependent on your individual needs and personal circumstances, there are numerous external grants and trusts you may be able to apply for.'

29. We would check whether the applicant had already made an application to another source i.e., a local council grant, Motability grant or housing association grant. In some cases, if the applicant had only received a partial grant from another source, WIBSS may be able to supplement that support.

30. If WIBSS receives a request for financial support to purchase for example equipment such as a specialised wheelchair, we would advise the applicant to firstly ensure they have sought support from their local Health Board or NHS provider (if living outside of Wales). Local NHS organisations still have a responsibility to provide healthcare services to WIBSS beneficiaries including where applicable provision of equipment. The secondary reason we would do this, would be to ensure the appropriate equipment is being purchased to meet the need.

At paragraph 161 of WITN4506001, you state that, to your knowledge, there are no areas of unmet need. Please can you expand on your answer, with particular regard to the need identified by the engagement process that concluded in March 2017 for support in accessing financial services such as insurance and other public services.

31. I had no prior knowledge of this example of unmet need. I understand that none of the UK schemes currently provide support in this area but that the ongoing parity discussions at a UK wide level with the four nations may still be considering this.

At paragraph 164 of WITN4506001, you explain that WIBSS payment rates are lower than all other UK nations schemes. Please explain, in general terms, your understanding of the justification for this lower payment rate.

32. When WIBSS was established in 2017, the rates were broadly on a par with those of the English scheme (EIBSS). WIBSS made an adjustment to introduce an Enhanced Stage 1 category in April 2019, backdated to 2018 which was when EIBSS had made a similar change. The UK Government then raised the EIBSS rates in 2019. Discussions about parity of rates between the four nations have been ongoing since that point.

33. WIBSS is only able to make payments in line with the rates set by the Welsh Government. WIBSS has not taken part in the UK level discussions around parity. Our only role has been to provide financial modelling of draft costings

associated with potential changes to the rates, to the Welsh Government and to colleagues in Department of Health and Social Care.

The Wales Infected Blood Support Scheme Directions 2017 (10 October 2017) [WIBS0000005] references an Operational Agreement made between the Welsh Ministers and Velindre NHS Trust. Please could you provide the Inquiry with this Operational Agreement?

34. A copy of the Operational Agreement is attached [WITN4065006]. This agreement was put in place at the start of WIBSS being established and did not take account of the Psychology team role.

35. We have very recently agreed a draft Memorandum of Understanding between ourselves, Velindre NHS Trust and Welsh Government. This reflects the currently operational arrangements in place, now that the scheme is fully established.

36. A copy of this document is attached [WITN4065007].

Please could you also provide any minutes of meetings between the Scheme, any other key operational documents which have not been provided to the Inquiry, and any documents setting out funding allocations for each financial year.

37. The notes of the Governance Group meetings are attached [WITN4506017 – WITN4506025], which I would consider to be the minutes of meetings between the Scheme parties. The notes of the March 2021 meeting are currently unconfirmed, our next Governance Group meeting will consider and confirm these.

38. We do not receive a funding allocation letter for WIBSS. Instead, we invoice Welsh Government, for reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred; this is usually done on a quarterly basis.

Please provide any further information in light of the recent announcement by Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services, relating to WIBSS payments dated 25 March 2021.

39. Since the announcement, the WIBSS finance team has been working with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care on the financial modelling of draft costings. Welsh Government has also been part of those discussions.

40. WIBSS is now awaiting the revised Directions which will enable us to process the payments. There will be two main elements of the payments:

- 1) a change in the regular payment rates from 1 April 2021 and
- 2) a backdated payment to address the differences in place between April 2019 and April 2021.

41. We are committed to processing those payments promptly once we are in receipt of the Directions. We will also respond to any queries beneficiaries may raise on the new payment rates and the calculation of the backdated amounts.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____

GRO-C

Dated _____ 10/05/2021 _____

Table of exhibits:

Question	Description	Exhibit number
Q3	A copy of the leaflet sent to GP practices	WITN4506011
Q4	Copies of the two letters sent by Welsh Government with an update on parity to beneficiaries and to widows.	WITN4506012 WITN4506013
Q4	A copy of the letter sent to Welsh Government from the WIBSS psychology lead Dr Caroline Coffey.	WITN4506014
Q6	Copy of information relating to position on Anti-D	WITN4506015
Q9	A copy of the Internal Audit Report	WITN4506016
Q13	A copy of the Operational Agreement	WITN4065006
Q13	A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding	WITN4065007
Q14	Notes of the Governance Group meetings (nine documents in total)	WITN4506017 - WITN4506025