

Witness Name: Holly Fitzgerald
Statement No.: WITN5671001
Exhibits: Nil
Dated: 3 / 6 / 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN WITNESS STATEMENT

Of

HOLLY FITZGERALD

I provide this statement in response to a request made under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, dated 30th April, 2021.

I, Holly Fitzgerald, will say as follows:

Section 1 - Introduction

1. My name is Holly Fitzgerald and I was born on GRO-C 1970. My maiden name is Lewis and I worked under this surname until 2017 when I changed careers. I now work as a GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C My current address is GRO-C GRO-C Shropshire, GRO-C.
2. I have a degree (BA Hons, History) from Oxford University awarded in 1991. I also have a Diploma in Broadcast Journalism awarded by the University of Wales College of Cardiff in 1992. After graduating I worked at Plymouth Sound

Radio and then ITV Westcountry as a broadcast journalist and presenter. In 1995 I moved to ITV Meridian in Southampton where I was initially engaged as a broadcast journalist but was soon promoted to news reporter working on the 6pm evening news programme 'Meridian Tonight'. In 1999 I was working as a general reporter but had been given special responsibility for stories relating to health issues.

3. Sometime in 1999, I cannot recall when, my colleagues on the news desk asked me to cover a story about a local man who was campaigning for a public inquiry into the infected blood scandal of the 1970s and 80s. My recollection is that the story came from the Haemophilia Society press office who sent us a press release with this local angle on a national story. The ITV Meridian South geographical region covered Hampshire, Dorset and West Sussex. I remember there was a press officer who I dealt with during this time, but I cannot remember her name. The local man was Chris Hodgson, the Chair of the Haemophilia Association.
4. I went to interview Chris Hodgson at his home near Winchester for a 2 min (approx') news item about his experience as a Haemophilia sufferer who had contracted Hepatitis via an infected blood product.
5. While I was with Mr Hodgson he told me there was a much bigger story to be told- the terrible loss of life suffered by a group of young men and boys who had received infected blood products when they were pupils at Lord Mayor Treloar College in Alton where he had been an outpatient. Mr Hodgson was keen that this story should be made public to raise awareness and add to the pressure he and his fellow campaigners were bringing on the government for a public enquiry.
6. I had no previous experience either professional or personal with regards to HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis, Haemophilia, the Haemophilia Society or The Lord Mayor Treloar College, Treloar Hospital or Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital.

7. Prior to the making of this programme I had not been involved in any other inquiries, investigations, campaigns, criminal proceedings or civil litigation as regards HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C infections and/or vCJD being present in blood products.
8. I have had no subsequent involvement in any other inquiries, investigations, campaigns, criminal proceedings or civil litigation as regards HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C infections and/or vCJD being present in blood products in which or for whom I might have provided a witness statement.

Section 2 - The Making Of 'Blood Brothers: The Treloar Story'

9. ITV Meridian had a regional documentary strand at the time called 'Meridian Focus'. As journalists working on the evening news we were invited to make one of these 30 minute programmes if we had a story we thought justified the longer time slot. I went to Steve McDonnell who was the executive producer and told him about the Treloar story. No one had ever covered this story before, either locally or nationally, and he was therefore very interested in the journalistic value of making a documentary. Mr McDonnell commissioned me to make the programme. I then met with Chris Hodgson to discuss the details.
10. The programme was to be made for ITV Meridian and broadcast in a midweek slot. As I recall it went out after News at Ten, but I can't remember precisely. The target audience was people with a particular interest in regional news and the commitment to stay up late to watch it.
11. I carried out all the research for the programme which became 'Blood Brothers'. There were only a handful of sources: Chris Hodgson who gave me all the information and contacts regarding the Lord Mayor Treloar College story; the Haemophilia Society press office and Colette Wintle who put me in touch with Carol Grayson and a different group of campaigners. I was also in touch with Ms Wintle, but I cannot recall the chronology. Ms Wintle lived in the ITV Meridian East news area which I moved to in June 2000. I cannot recall how

we met or the timing in relation to my first meeting with Chris Hodgson, but she was also instrumental in my involvement with the campaign.

12. Chris Hodgson was the driving force behind the programme although Colette Wintle was also key to it being made. They, along with the Haemophilia Society were keen to raise as much awareness as possible of the suffering endured by the haemophiliac community in their campaign for a public enquiry. Mr Hodgson was the main point of contact as he had access to those involved at Treloar College.

13. I conducted all the separate interviews from which contributors to the programme appeared. These interviews were conducted in person with a camera operator. There were no additional producers or researchers. No additional audio or audio-visual recordings made. No notes were taken as I relied on the recorded material. It was clear from the outset that the issues around the experiences of the haemophiliacs at the Lord Mayor Treloar College were extremely sensitive and needed to be handled with discretion. Chris Hodgson made all the initial approaches to the contributors related to the school and set up the interviews. I had minimal contact with the interviewees beforehand.

14. The interviews occurred in the following locations:

John Peach - Mr Peach did not live in the Meridian region. We met at a neutral venue. I can't remember where it was.

Jane Price - I think that interview was carried out at Lord Mayor Treloar College.

Dr Mark Winter - I'm pretty sure that was filmed at his clinic at the hospital in East Kent.

Amanda Beesley - I interviewed Amanda at her home which was in the Meridian Region. I can't remember where.

Cady Khudabux - I travelled to GRO-C to interview Mr Khudabux.

Colette Wintle - this interview was conducted in her home in GRO-C
GRO-C

Chris Hodgson - This interview was carried out at Treloar College.

15. To my knowledge no non-broadcast notes or records of these interviews currently exist. Any notes I took during my research were destroyed. I am in the habit of keeping notebooks as good journalistic practice, but by the time I moved to Shropshire in 2010 I had thrown them away. The uncut material filmed by the camera operator will have been recycled. In 1999 we were still filming on Beta tapes. Once items had been broadcast the 'rushes' (uncut material) were deleted and the camera operators reused the tapes.
16. The interviewees who I met with in person were John Peach, Amanda Beesley, Jane Price, Dr Mark Winter, Colette Wintle, Cady Khudabux and Chris Hodgson. All the information for the documentary came principally from these sources, as far as I can remember. The Haemophilia Society also helped me, but I can't remember who. I think I also spoke to Carol Grayson but I can't be sure if that was before or after the making of the documentary. Carol lived in a different ITV region. Either Chris Hodgson or Colette Wintle introduced me to all these people.
17. To the best of my knowledge and understanding no notes or recordings of contributors to 'Blood Brothers - The Treloar Story' still exist. The librarians at ITV Meridian in Southampton would be able to confirm this assumption.
18. No other prospective contributors were interviewed but not relied upon in the final broadcast.
19. I'm pretty sure Chris Hodgson approached The Lord Mayor Treloar College to ask for permission to film at the school and to inform them of our plans to make the documentary. We dealt with a press officer whose name I cannot recall. I do not recall any involvement with The Lord Mayor Treloar Trust or Treloar Trust directly. My understanding is that the Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital, the Treloar Haemophilia Centre did not exist in the late 1990s. I do not recall

approaching the Wessex Regional Haemophilia Centre in Alton. I cannot recall who approached the National Health Service, but there is a statement from the Department of Health in the programme which I must have requested. I cannot recall approaching the Regional Health Authority, but it may not have been relevant to request their involvement.

20. The Press Officer for the school was extremely concerned about the reputation of the organisation, but she appreciated the national importance of raising awareness of the issues surrounding infected blood products. We trod carefully and agreed to reflect the positive work the school was involved in and were therefore granted limited access for the filming of Debbie Thrower's pieces to camera and some of the interviews.
21. I do not recall if any of the bodies named in paragraph 19 above declined to participate or assist.
22. It was my understanding that Chris Hodgson was in contact with a number of people who had been treated with infected blood products whilst at Treloar College, but who were very reluctant to talk about it because of the stigma attached to an HIV diagnosis. He often referred to these people but never by name and I had no impression of how many there were or their identities. He told me they did not want the programme to be made as people would know they were haemophiliacs and students at Lord Mayor Treloar College and would therefore find out they were HIV positive. Mr Hodgson was concerned but felt the story should be told for the greater good. My recollections are not clear, but I am fairly sure that on the day the programme was due to be broadcast he received what he described as a 'death threat' from one of these nameless people. I remember Mr Hodgson phoned me to tell me this, but as a team we decided to go ahead because Mr Hodgson believed it was the right course of action.
23. Most of the footage was filmed inside Treloar College. We filmed in a blood laboratory in a hospital for the opening shots, but I cannot remember which one.

As unofficial health correspondent I had good relationships with the local hospital press teams who must have facilitated the filming.

24. I cannot recall where we filmed the blurred images of young males playing soccer. TV is a visual medium and we needed additional images to tell our story. I remember the discussion about needing the shots, but I cannot remember where we decided to film them in the end.

25. I cannot recall if anyone else was approached to participate in the programme and declined to do so.

Section 3 - The Broadcast

26. I cannot remember the exact date of transmission. The programme was aired on ITV 1 but only in the Meridian Region.

27. There will have been limited publicity prior to the broadcast of the programme. No reaction reached us directly. The only issue was the objections of the nameless haemophilia patients who were in touch with Chris Hodgson. They had heard of the programme through their networks rather than via publicity.

28. It's difficult to gauge public reaction to the broadcast as I doubt the viewing figures were very high. I have always understood the Haemophilia Society and those involved with Lord Mayor Treloar College were happy enough with the final programme.

29. My recollection is that all the contributors were happy with the final programme and the way the issues were represented.

30. I do not recall any feedback or inquiries from any specific organisations. The programme won a Royal Television Society (Southern Centre) award for 'Best Regional Current Affairs Programme' which I collected in October 2001.

31. I do not recall what, if any feedback Mr Hodgson received. I do not recall further objections being raised by the former pupils of Treloar who did not want the programme to be made. I kept in touch with Mr Hodgson for a short while after and with Colette Wintle for a little longer and my impression was always that the programme was favourably received by the haemophiliac community.

Section 4 - Politicians

32. I do not recall if Dr David Owen was approached as a possible contributor to 'Blood Brothers'.

33. I do not recall if Sir Robert Syms MP was approached as a possible contributor to 'Blood Brothers'.

34. I do not recall approaching Alan Milburn MP or John Denham MP but I would have made the approach and I would have done so via their parliamentary offices.

Section 5 - Campaigns

35. I have never been a member of or a supporter of any infected blood related campaign.

36. I can remember covering the visit to Downing Street of the campaigners to lay flowers in remembrance of those who died from Hepatitis C. I recollect the event and am fairly sure Chris Hodgson was there along with Colette Wintle and Carol. That is the limit of my recollection.

37. I do not recall whether Michael Mates MP was involved in the group's attendance.

38. I do not recall approaching Michael Mates MP in relation to the Haemophilia Society's campaign.

39. I am almost certain I attended the flower laying in Downing Street. I cannot recall if I covered this as a news item for Meridian Tonight or specifically in relation to the documentary.

Section 6 - Additional Programmes

40. No follow-up programmes were made after the broadcast of 'Blood Brothers: The Treloar Story'. In GRO-C 2001 I took maternity leave for the birth of my first son. When I returned to work it was on a part-time basis and I no longer specialised in health stories. The Meridian Focus documentary strand was discontinued.

Section 7 - Impact

41. The story of the haemophiliac youngsters at Treloar College was by far the biggest story I ever covered as a journalist working on the ITV regional news. Meeting the contributors, particularly John Peach and Amanda Beesley, and hearing their stories of such terrible loss affected me deeply. I regretted that I did not do more to highlight the campaign through my work as a journalist.

42. Sadly, I lost touch with Chris Hodgson and I was very sorry to hear he had died. After I moved to the Meridian East programme based in Maidstone in June 2000 I stayed in contact with Colette Wintle who also lived in Kent and worked on some story ideas with her and Carol Grayson. They arranged for me to meet Dr David Owen in London. I cannot remember what he said, but it didn't lead to a recorded interview. It was difficult to keep finding a regional angle on a big national story and our contact dwindled especially after I started working part time. In 2010 I moved to GRO-C and worked for GRO-C in Birmingham as a freelance reporter. Coincidentally Colette Wintle had also moved to the Midlands and I did speak to her again in relation to the ongoing campaign during my time there but did not do any further filming as far as I recall.

Section 8 - Other

I have no further information to add.

Statement Of Truth

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

Signed:

GRO-C

Holly Fitzgerald

Dated:

3 / 6 / 2021