

The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE
HAEMOPHILIA
SOCIETY

A summary of Inquiry hearings from Leeds

The Infected Blood Inquiry moved north this week to a wet and windy Leeds.

Opening the hearings, which are taking place in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Inquiry chair Sir Brian Langstaff stressed the importance of moving around the UK to enable more people to be involved.

For the first time he had to announce that a witness had dropped out due to ill health. This was a reminder of the importance of pressing on with the work of the Inquiry. Sir Brian said: "We don't have the luxury of time. People continue to suffer and people continue to die."

The hearings began with the heartbreaking evidence of John Cornes, who is one of

six brothers with haemophilia, three of whom died as a result of contaminated blood products. His family were vilified after the press discovered that his brother Roy had infected his girlfriend with HIV who subsequently died. John remembers how they were called the "Aids Family" and subjected to abuse. It was so bad that his eldest two children changed their surnames to "avoid the Cornes treatment".

Another witness, Dave Gort, who has severe haemophilia A, described using £45,000 of the £50,000 he received from The Skipton Fund to pay for his own treatment as he became desperate to clear his Hep C. He said it was "disgusting" to have

had to fight for treatment having been infected as a result of contaminated blood products.

Lesley McEvoy, who had tried to avoid a blood transfusion in 1985 because she was aware of the risks of contracting HIV through blood, told how she only agreed after a junior doctor promised her "guaranteed" heat treated blood. Sir Brian himself cast doubt on whether it is possible to heat treat blood and suggested a label could have been put on the blood to "reassure" or "mislead" her. He said he needed more evidence to decide. Lesley described her long fight to clear her Hep C.

The Inquiry continues in Leeds next week from June 18–21.

Quotes of the week

I have got a load of nephews and nieces from the brothers who died and I have nephews that haven't got a mother or father. It's affected at least 30 of my family. So I am here to represent not just the infected but the affected. I didn't really want to do this, but there is a need. "

John Cornes, one of six brothers with haemophilia. Three died as well as the partners of two of the brothers.

"This was a lonely struggle, covered in a blanket of denial by several governments."

Lesley McEvoy, who contracted Hep C after a blood transfusion.

"I wasn't going to treat Keith any differently. He would feel my touch. We were normal people and he needed a normal wife to care for him."

Jo-Anne Cohrs on refusing to wear gloves while caring for her husband Keith who died from HIV as a result of treatment for his haemophilia.

"We are stood in the doorway and he [the doctor] doesn't even say 'please take a seat'. All he says is: 'Hello. I see you're HIV positive.'"

Martin Beard on being told by a doctor he'd never met before that he had HIV at the age of 17 in 1986.

Inquiry news

The testimonies this week have been extremely powerful and we know that they have taken many people back to very difficult and traumatic times. If you are struggling, please seek support. The Inquiry offers a psychological support service run by the British Red Cross. Counsellors are available at the Inquiry and there is a confidential support line on 0800 458 9473 or 0203 417 0280 available Monday 11-1pm, Wednesday 7-9pm or Friday 2-4pm.

If you have any questions about the Inquiry, need support or would like to know how to submit a witness statement, please email Debra Morgan on publicinquiry@haemophilia.org.uk or call 0207 939 0780.