

The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE
HAEMOPHILIA
SOCIETY

A summary of Inquiry hearings from London

This week's expert hearings were a stepping stone between personal testimonies and evidence to come from decision makers.

The hearings began with evidence from the inquiry's three intermediaries, who interviewed 85 people—11 with haemophilia- who did not want to give evidence directly to the inquiry. The intermediaries said they felt "privileged and humbled" that so many people had shared their stories with them, which they in turn told to the inquiry.

Next, the inquiry heard from expert witnesses in the fields of psychology, hepatitis, HIV and bleed-

ing disorders. Their job was to put the evidence heard so far from those infected and affected into a clinical context.

A theme which ran through every witness session, including the intermediaries, was the need for psychological support.

Witnesses said that people lacked psychological support decades ago when dealing with life-changing diagnosis, grief and stigma. They also said that as many were re-living those experiences again today as a result of the Infected Blood Inquiry, they needed specialist mental health support now.

Psycho-social expert witness Prof Deborah Christie said: "We need to make sure that anyone brave enough to stand up and tell their story knows that help and support is available and it should be offered."

Concluding, inquiry chair, Sir Brian Langstaff said there was a need for "effective, knowledgeable, expert psychological support". He added: "The health of the mind affects the health of the body and the health of the body affects the health of the mind."

All the week's evidence can be found here: <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/evidence>

Inquiry news— what happens next?

Sir Brian Langstaff said the inquiry timetable was "on course" for the next stage of its public investigations which will take place in June and July. He said these hearings will focus on the "knowledge of risk" with particular reference to haemophilia centres and the clinicians that practiced in those centres. The inquiry has not given any definite dates for those hearings, nor have any names of potential witnesses been confirmed. Sir Brian said he had now personally read more than 1,000 witness statements as well as heard the evidence from 189 people in public hearings. A team of 200 inquiry investigators continues to study millions of documents relating to the inquiry. The inquiry has said it plans to hold about 40 more weeks of public hearings, spread over the next 18 months, with a final report not expected to be published until the middle of 2022.

Quotes of the week

"I was struck by the dignity that people showed. We felt we saw the best of humanity."

Jackie Wilson, inquiry intermediary on those who shared their experiences with the intermediary service.

"It is exhausting to constantly be trying to not let people know through what you do or how you do it or what you say or where you go."

Prof Deborah Christie, psycho-social expert on the impact of keeping a diagnosis secret.

"You can talk and talk about how you feel...but I think the greatest form of support for a large number of people is going to be achieved by a successful outcome from this inquiry, and reconciliation."

Dame Lesley Fallowfield, psycho-social expert.

"We really can't overestimate the impact of psychological problems in somebody who is HIV positive. It really is something that is core and runs through the whole life of someone who is HIV positive."

Dr Ian Williams, HIV expert witness.

"I would like to draw attention publicly now...to the fact that the need for specialist treatment by professionals who have a special understanding of infected blood and blood products has not gone away."

Sir Brian Langstaff, inquiry chair, in his closing comments.