

The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE
HAEMOPHILIA
SOCIETY

A summary of inquiry hearings from London

This week the inquiry heard evidence in person from Dr Brian Colvin, director of the Royal London's haemophilia centre, from 1977— 2007.

Giving evidence over two days, Dr Colvin was taken through key documents and medical journals at moments when breakthroughs were made concerning hepatitis infections in the 1970s and HIV in the early 1980s.

He was adamant that to revert to cryoprecipitate as concerns grew about the safety of factor products was not realistic. He said cryo was "old hat" and would mean "going backwards" in haemophilia care.

He also said he was unaware that some centres were using heat treated factor products by May 1984.

The inquiry heard that by 1987, 41 of his patients were diagnosed with HIV, including six children. He said some of those patients were treated at other centres or came to him already infected.

Later, 80 of his patients were diagnosed with hepatitis C.

The issue of consent for testing for HIV and, later, hep C was discussed at length. Dr Colvin used stored blood samples from his patients and did not ask for their permission, a decision he stood by. In 1991 the same

thing happened with hep C testing. Dr Colvin said he thought of the tests as a continuation of his "routine work" of monitoring for hepatitis. He insisted that his patients were informed of their diagnosis by him personally.

He remembered sitting with his "head in his hands" in late 1984. He told the inquiry: "We had reached rock bottom of our understanding and our power to deal with this crisis."

Concluding, Dr Colvin said he "deeply regretted" that any of his patients were infected with a "viral agent". He paid tribute to his nursing team.

Inquiry news

Two days of evidence this week have been presentations on St Thomas' Haemophilia Centre and Oxford Haemophilia Centre as well as a short period finishing evidence about Professor Arthur Bloom and Cardiff Haemophilia Centre. Acknowledging that the picture of care at St Thomas' under Prof Geoff Savidge (1979-2006) was an "incomplete jigsaw", counsel for the inquiry, Jenni Richards QC, said his patients' witness statements would be needed to fill in the gaps. Evidence given by Prof Savidge to the Archer Inquiry in 2007 was used extensively in the presentation. He was critical of the "lack of political will" in following through after experts identified a looming "public health catastrophe".

The next live evidence will be from Prof Christine Lee from the Royal Free Hospital in London on Tuesday 20 October, starting at 10am.

Quotes of the week

"We should have been clearer about what we feared. But I think in communicating with patients, one perhaps doesn't always communicate one's greatest fears."

Dr Brian Colvin on non A non B hepatitis in the late 1970s.

"We were physicians who were also pathologists who had the task of solving problems. We believed, perhaps incorrectly, that we did have the kind of consent that we required to undertake the investigations to solve an urgent problem."

Dr Colvin on HIV testing

"The fact that hemophiliacs are at risk for AIDS is becoming clear. If the use of cryoprecipitate will minimize this risk, the current home-infusion program needs to be revised."

New England Journal of Medicine, January 1983

"I was not prepared to wait around for somebody to tell me that it would be better to use a Crown Immune approved product that I knew was contaminated in preference to a product that I knew had gone through formal FDA-type testing."

Prof Geoff Savidge in 2007