

The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE
HAEMOPHILIA
SOCIETY

A summary of remote inquiry hearings

This week the inquiry heard from its panel of experts on medical ethics.

The panel were: Prof Bobbie Farsides, Prof Julian Savulescu, Prof Emma Cave, Dr Melinee Kazarian and Prof Ian Kerridge, who was participating from Australia.

Evidence did not focus on individual cases but covered a range of ethical principles which could help inquiry chair, Sir Brian Langstaff, when considering

evidence. Prof Savulescu said ethics was often not black and white but grey, and all members of the panel were keen to emphasise that in most cases there was no “right” answer. He summed up medical ethics as “doing what’s in the best interests of the patients”. Topics discussed included the ethics of research, informed consent, giving a diagnosis, the right not to know and dealing with mistakes.

Asked if actions taken in the past should be judged by different ethical standards, Prof Farsides said: “There are certain things that happen where when it happened, in terms of time and space, are not going to excuse them .. because we have a fundamental belief that moral wrongs and harms were entailed in what was done.”

She said ethics was now a “continual strand” across all medical education.

Inquiry news in focus: clinicians’ evidence

Sir Brian announced that seven retired haemophilia clinicians will not be giving oral evidence to the inquiry, including Dr Peter Jones, of Newcastle Royal Infirmary, who had originally been listed to appear. Sir Brian Langstaff said he now did not think this was “reasonable”. He did not specify why the clinicians will not give oral evidence but pointed to guidance which lists ill-health as a reason. The other clinicians are: Elizabeth Mayne (Belfast), Charles Rizza (Oxford), Richard Wensley (Manchester), Frank Hill (Birmingham), Morag Chisholm (Southampton) and Layinka Swinburne (Leeds). Next week there will be a presentation on Newcastle Haemophilia Centre on 2 and 3 February. The hearings on 2 Feb will start with a presentation on the first Cardiff AIDS patient, Kevin Slater.

Quotes of the week

“The clinician is taking the decision for the patient because he knows ... what the patient really wants ... and is using knowledge as a form of control ... in order to ensure that the patient takes the decision which, had they been fully informed, he thinks they would not have taken. So it's totally objectionable, isn't it?” Sir Brian Langstaff

“Sometimes professional guidelines can be unethical, and the ethical thing to do is not to follow them. To be, you know, a moral and responsible doctor is to be able to give your own moral reasons for your actions and to be able to justify them.” Prof Julian Savulescu

“We've been very moved by the testimony that we've heard from core participants and, whilst we haven't touched upon their direct experience and their stories, they haven't been far from our minds when we have been speaking with you over the last two days.” Prof Bobbie Farsides

“We had promised miracles and given them HIV and for that .. as a part of the medical profession I would like to apologise. I do hope that you get the justice and compensation that you deserve and I hope that we can move forward ... and identify the ethical failings and do better in the future.”

Prof Julian Savulescu

“In acknowledging that mistakes have happened, you reflect upon your own practice, your own values...or you think very clearly about what you personally could have done differently, may have done better. “

Prof Bobbie Farsides