

# Infected Blood Inquiry

The Inquiry held its first public meeting in September 2018 with a commemoration of the victims. It opened with a song by Emeli Sande entitled "Read all about it". The words had many echoes of the Inquiries' role including "now we are finally finding our voices". It set the tone for what was to follow. A patient focused statement of "what we know and what remains unknown" followed read by what I assume was two actors. It is set out in full below.

## THIS IS WHAT WE KNOW

In the 1970's and 1980's thousands of patients receiving treatment in the UK were given tainted blood products.

These blood products were contaminated with the HIV and Hepatitis C viruses. We don't yet have the exact figures but so far nearly 3000 people have died, and that number keeps growing. Remember Peter who died in Scotland just a few weeks ago.

*The survivors, the infected, who are still living suffer the appalling consequences of what happened... every day, every hour, every minute of their lives. The affected, the widows, the lovers, the sons, the daughters, the mothers and fathers, the grandchildren- they suffer too, in grief, in anger, in silence.*

## THIS IS WHAT WE KNOW

It started with the haemophiliacs, many of whom were still schoolboys. Factor 8 seemed like a miracle stopping bleeds quickly and even preventing them.

This wonder drug let boys be boys; play football, climb trees, mess around on bikes and do all the things that teenagers do. And it wasn't only teenage boys. Boys much younger were also treated with Factor 8.

But Factor 8 was made from pooled blood from thousands of blood donations. If just one donor

had an infection the entire batch would be contaminated.

Mainly from the USA the blood was taken from those who were paid to donate which included prisoners, drug addicts and those on the edges of society.

And, British blood was also infected. The horrific consequences were inevitable. In all it is thought that over 4500 haemophiliacs were affected in the UK and around a quarter of these 1250 people were infected with both HIV and Hepatitis C.

Half of the infected haemophiliacs are now dead and they are still dying.

But it did not stop with haemophiliacs and it wasn't only men. Because people were not always told about their infection, young women newly married and in love were infected with HIV by their husbands.

Full of hope and with dreams of a future and a family they had no idea that their lives would be so cruelly destroyed as well as in some cases the lives of their unborn.

And it did not stop there.

People wrongly thought to have haemophilia were caught up in this nightmare and infected too. Other people discovered that a blood transfusion received whilst in hospital, whether having a baby or after a car accident or during a routine operation or getting dental treatment could leave them infected.

They too are victims and they were often only told what had happened many years after they were infected.

As well as infection the consequences of this tragedy permeated every single aspect of life and the lives of family, friends, and all around them.

For too many the infection took away life itself. For many hundreds of innocent people, it has taken away their dreams, their hopes, their dignity, their freedom, their livelihood, their sanity, their potential and even their homes and marriages. It is creeping; it is insidious. It is impossibly cruel.

People have lived with the stigma of HIV and Hep C for decades.

Many feeling faced to live in silence and terrified in case neighbours found out especially in the dark periods of the 1980's.

Homes daubed in graffiti, children bullied in school, parents losing their jobs and children put into care without knowing why.

The infected and affected with us today will tell us that this is still going on.

So many live in silence. They have never told their family what happened to them. Not only infected but feeling obliged to keep it a secret for decades.

But the pain does not stop there. People were not informed of the risks-even though the risks were known. Medical records have gone missing and government documents have been destroyed. The drugs to keep people alive have terrible side effects. Financial support to live with a little dignity has been lacking. Questions asked for decades remain unanswered.

### ***THIS IS WHAT WE KNOW BUT TOO MUCH REMAINS UNKNOWN***

Short patient stories followed, and a choir completed the commemoration.

This highly charged and emotional opening was enormously powerful.

It brought tears to many eyes and opened for all see the tragedy that was about to unfold. As one expert witness was later to put it "the greatest disaster in the history of the NHS" was at last being exposed.

**It remains to be seen whether the Inquiry will be about learning lessons from a tragedy or a hunt for people to blame and punish.**

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