

EHC NOW!



UK public inquiry into the blood contamination

By Laura Savini with text provided courtesy of the Haemophilia Society UK

The start of the week was high in emotions for the haemophilia community in the United Kingdom (UK) as a series of preliminary hearings were held Monday through Wednesday for the Statutory Inquiry into the Contaminated Blood Scandal. The events were opened by a commemorative ceremony in which survivors or relatives of those who passed away following the contamination were able to provide first-hand accounts of the personal impact the contamination had on their lives and on the lives of their loved ones. The hearings continued with opening statements about priorities for the Inquiry and procedural matters.

The victims of this tragedy have been waiting for 40 years for an investigation that could provide them with answers as to how such a tragedy could have occurred, the lack of adequate response from authorities to these events and whether there was misconduct from government officials. The contaminated blood scandal did not only affect people from the haemophilia community but also people affected by thalassaemia and people who received blood transfusions.

The Statutory Inquiry into the Contaminated Blood Scandal was set up following an announcement by the UK Prime Minister, Mrs Theresa May, in 2017. In a statement in the UK Parliament she described the scandal as *“an appalling tragedy which should simply never have happened”*.

The UK Government later confirmed that the inquiry would have full powers, including the power to compel the production of documents and to summon witnesses to give evidence under oath.

In February 2018 it was announced that High Court Judge Sir Brian Langstaff would be the full time Chair of the Inquiry. Speaking on his appointment Sir Brian said: *“Providing infected blood and plasma products to patients truly deserves to be called a major scandal. I intend, through this Inquiry, to be able to provide both some well-needed answers to the victims and their families, and recommend steps to ensure that its like will never happen again.”*

The Inquiry officially got underway on 2 July 2018, following the announcement in the UK House of Commons of the detailed Terms of Reference. Haemophilia Society UK Chief Executive, Liz Carroll, said: *“The Community has campaigned long and hard for this Statutory Public Inquiry to be held. With this announcement of the Terms of Reference, the way is now finally clear for the Inquiry to begin and justice to be served [...] The Society is committed to seeking the truth and will not rest until justice is achieved for all.”*

Sir Brian Langstaff said: *“What is difficult to comprehend is the sheer scale of what happened. The numbers of people, both adults and children, from all walks of life who were infected by hepatitis viruses, or HIV, from clotting factor or transfused blood runs into thousands. At least as many more – including partners, children, parents, families, friends or carers – have been affected [...] This may have happened principally in the 1970s and 1980s, but the consequences persist today with people continuing to feel the mental, physical, social, work-related and financial effects [...] Many of the people infected and their families have battled for years to understand what happened and how they have been treated since. I aim to put the*

people who have been infected and affected at the heart of this Inquiry. I am determined to get to the truth and where necessary will use the Inquiry's power to compel witnesses to explain their actions."

Barry Flynn, Chair of the Trustees of the Haemophilia Society UK said: "As Chair of the Haemophilia Society, and a member of many years standing, I welcome the official start of the long-awaited Statutory Public Inquiry into the contaminated blood scandal. As part of this community I am acutely aware of the impact this has had on individuals, their families and loved ones. We have waited decades for this and want the truth to be revealed and for people to find justice and, hopefully, closure." He then added: "Through my role as Chair and the conversations I have had with those who live with, or have lost relatives through, this tragedy I know there are many who do not feel they can be heard as they are not natural 'campaigners.' Our role at the Haemophilia Society is to help the 'quiet voices' of those affected by bleeding disorders in the UK and, through our international networks, ensure best practice is shared across the world." Barry concluded by saying: "I am very pleased that, at last, the Inquiry is getting underway and that, whatever the truth is, it comes out and we all get the answers we have deserved for so long."

The Haemophilia Society UK has also developed a [website](#) to provide further information into the inquiry itself and all of the advances can be followed on its official [website](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) account where the hearings will be live-streamed.

The story has got much attention within the UK and internationally and notably the [BBC](#) has been covering in depth the progress of the inquiry and the impact that this tragedy has had on the lives of those affected.

The EHC wishes to thank the Haemophilia Society UK for the information provided here above and will strive to provide its members with regular updates on the Inquiry.

For more information about this please contact publicinquiry@haemophilia.org.uk directly or get in touch with representatives from the UK National Member Organisation (NMO) face-to-face during next week's EHC Conference in Brussels, Belgium, for those attending.