



Witness Statement Ref No.

**WITNESS STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE OUTBREAK OF
CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE IN THE NORTHERN TRUST HOSPITALS**

WITNESS NAME: Caitlin McCoy

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE

I, Caitlin McCoy, say as follows:

1. My name is Caitlin McCoy and I live at an address which is known to the Inquiry Team. I am the daughter of Frances Angela McCoy who was a patient at Antrim Area Hospital and Braid Valley Hospital between October 2007 and February 2008. By occupation I am a Ward Manager in the Ulster Hospital. I have been a Ward Manager for 10 years and a Nurse for 30 years.

Pre-existing medical history

2. My mother had longstanding arthritis and over a number of years she has had a hip and knee replacement at Musgrave Park Hospital. Otherwise and apart from these two operations, she has been fully mobile, self caring and independent at home. She has also been taking antidepressants but apart from that she was in good health. At the present time she is 79 years of age and so she was 77 years of age when she was admitted to Antrim Area Hospital in October 2007.

Admission to Antrim Area Hospital

3. She was admitted to Antrim Area Hospital towards the end of October 2007. The reason being that she had not been eating and drinking properly at home and was becoming confused. We brought her to the Accident and Emergency Department at Antrim Area Hospital where they said she had a urinary tract

infection and dehydration. She was given fluids and antibiotics. They also arranged a CT scan as they felt that she might have had a small stroke.

Wards

4. She was admitted to a Medical Assessment Unit and she was there for about 24 hours and then she was transferred to one of the B wards. It was a six bedded ward but they had placed an extra bed down the middle of the ward so that there were in fact seven patients there. She was in the third bed on the left closest to the window.
5. Her condition at that time was improving. She was drinking more and was still on antibiotics. After about four or five days there she was able to walk to the toilet. She was in this ward for about one week.
6. While she was there I noticed that one of the patients who had been in a bed opposite my mother had gone and the cleaners were in cleaning down the whole area. I heard them talking and one of them said that the patient who had left had been diagnosed with C difficile.
7. The next day when I called to visit my mother she had been moved to an isolation room in the same ward. She stayed there for a week or two.
8. She was then moved to the Cardiac Ward which I think was also called A1 where she stayed for a further week before she was eventually moved to Braid Valley Hospital.
9. So she was in four different locations in Antrim Area Hospital over a period of four or five weeks.
10. When she left Antrim Area Hospital her condition was terrible. She was not walking and had lost a lot of weight. She was completely confused and did not know where she was. She recognised her family but that was all she knew. She seemed to be completely demented. She was no longer having

the diarrhoea but she could not walk, was not toileting herself and required two nurses to do everything for her. The doctors told us that she may not recover. Her dementia was very sudden and acute.

Transfer to Braid Valley Hospital

11. She was transferred to Braid Valley Hospital about two weeks before Christmas 2007. Antrim Area Hospital consulted with us about the move and the family agreed with the transfer. We felt that Braid Valley Hospital would be the best chance of her being rehabilitated as she would get physiotherapy and other treatment there.
12. Braid Valley Hospital is a fairly small hospital. There are only two independent wards and they probably deal with about 50 patients in total. She was initially put into an open four bedded bay but then about one week later she was transferred to a single room where she was over the Christmas period.
13. Braid Valley Hospital told the family that she was being transferred to a single room because she had contracted C difficile again. They told us that her sample was positive.

Visits

14. I visited my mother every day that she was in Antrim Area Hospital and Braid Valley Hospital. This would have been during normal visiting hours. My father, sister and brothers would all have been regular visitors. I found the visiting times to be rather restrictive. I also found the hospital to be uncooperative about moving away from visiting hours as there was an occasion when I had an appointment to meet her physician and after the meeting I asked to speak to my mother and was told that I could only see her for one minute as it was not normal visiting hours. This was despite the fact that I had travelled quite a long distance for this very short meeting with the doctor.

15. Our family stayed with her for the entire visiting period which was about two hours every evening.

Care at Antrim Area Hospital

16. My mother has very little recollection of her time in hospital and so I can only go on my own experience and that of the family.

17. When she was in B Ward the family had great concerns about her care and the way that she was being looked after. We were firstly concerned about the extra bed that had been placed down the centre of the ward making it a seven bedded rather than a six bedded ward.

18. We were also concerned about cleanliness and hygiene in B Ward. The commodes were being moved about and were not being emptied or cleaned. I was also concerned about staff hygiene as they were wearing gloves but were not changing them as they moved between the patients' beds. We were not told that my mother was being moved to a single room and the communication in B Ward was disappointing.

19. We were not told anything about her condition, the issues involved, dealing with her laundry or our own personal hygiene. I would like to have been given information and spoken to about these issues.

20. I never saw her being treated or attended to by any doctors or nurses but then I was only allowed to visit during visiting time. I found it difficult to speak to any member of staff about her care and was told that I would have to make an appointment with the consultant involved. This appointment had to be made through his secretary. The same applied if you tried to speak to a more junior doctor. We found this attitude to be unacceptable.

21. I found the attitude of the staff on B Ward of Antrim Area Hospital to be poor. I am sorry to have to say this but we were very disappointed with the lack of information, contact and care that she received.
22. When my brother and I did finally get an appointment with the consultant, he did not even have the results of the scan.
23. I do not feel that the staff in Antrim Area Hospital attended to my mother's needs. She was very upset, confused and demented. She was distressed every time she was moved and her condition seemed to deteriorate after every move. We were told that she had dementia and they implied that she may never recover but we felt if she could get over the physical side of what was happening to her and could eat and drink better then we thought that she could recover.
24. When she was moved to Ward A1 the care that she received there was much better. They communicated with us and explained what was happening. The nursing staff would speak to us when we came on the ward and let us know how my mother was progressing. They also informed us that her stools were clear.
25. No-one in Antrim Area Hospital ever told us that my mother had C difficile and we had to find this out for ourselves. The care in A1 was however much better than in B Ward.

Care at Braid Valley Hospital

26. We felt that her care at Braid Valley Hospital was much better than her care at Antrim Area Hospital. This is despite the fact that she got C difficile again in Braid Valley Hospital which made her condition deteriorate further. We had better communication with the staff and we were also, for the first time, given written instructions on how to look after someone's laundry who had C difficile. We were given an information sheet which explained how we should wash her laundry. It also gave some information about other aspects of care.

27. I frequently saw nurses dealing with her on a personal basis at Braid Valley Hospital. At Antrim Area Hospital the nurses would deal with the drips, antibiotics and medication. They would have washed and cleaned her but the personal attention was much less than at Braid Valley Hospital. Braid Valley Hospital had more time to interact with her and to provide physiotherapy and individual attention.

28. She got C difficile again over Christmas and her condition again deteriorated. It knocked her back physically but thankfully with the physiotherapy and personal attention that she received at Braid Valley Hospital her condition improved. She was much more content as the staff really attended to her needs. She managed to get back on her feet and was eventually discharged in February 2008.

29. The attitude of the staff at Braid Valley Hospital was excellent.

Cleanliness of Antrim Area Hospital

30. I have no issue with Antrim Area Hospital regarding cleanliness. Although I did not see any cleaning being done, the floors, lockers, beds, toilet and communal areas seemed clean. There was however a smell or odour in the place. This would have been round about the toilet areas.

31. My mother needed full care. She needed to be bathed and toileted in Antrim Area Hospital and Braid Valley Hospital. I was satisfied with her personal hygiene. Her nighties were changed and the bed linen was clean.

32. There were gel dispensers but I do not think that they were being used as much as they should have been by patients and relatives.

33. I have already referred to the fact that I saw nurses using gloves but not changing them as they moved from bed to bed.

34. Visitors were never instructed or asked to wear any protective clothing.

35. There were not enough chairs and visitors would frequently have to sit on the beds. This I know is something which is frowned upon as there could be cross contamination but there were just not enough chairs for visitors to sit on at visiting time and so the visitors had nowhere else to sit.

36. I did not notice any spillages, dust or dirt in the hospital.

Cleanliness in Braid Valley Hospital

37. We were able to visit my mother a lot more at Braid Valley Hospital because we live nearby. I saw the nurses washing their hands a lot more and wearing gloves and aprons. The gloves were changed as the nurses moved between patients. The commodes were clean and so were the toilets. The communication, instructions, attention to detail and cleanliness were better than at Antrim Area Hospital.

38. I used to take her laundry home for cleaning. At Antrim Area Hospital they had left her laundry in a bag in her locker. I took them home, washed them and brought them back. However I was not given any instruction or advice at Antrim Area Hospital as to how to wash them.

39. At Braid Valley Hospital as soon as she was diagnosed with C difficile I was given an information leaflet about the infection and it explained how we were supposed to launder the clothes. It also explained other issues in relation to care, hygiene and washing of hands.

Communication at Antrim Area Hospital

40. I never received any written notices or leaflets at Antrim Area Hospital nor do I recall seeing any notices or information on the wall.

41. We were not even told she had C difficile and she was moved to a single room without any discussion or communication with the family. My brother did however seek out and speak to a nurse who told him that she had been moved because she had C difficile.
42. The family were shocked. We were really distraught as we knew how serious this infection was with older people. All we were told by the hospital was that she had C difficile. It was just one sentence and no further information was given. No-one else spoke to us or gave us any help or guidance. I felt that this was quite insensitive.
43. My mother was very confused and so I am not sure if they spoke to her or not. She has no recollection of the whole period.
44. We were never given any diagnosis or prognosis of her infection by the hospital. No-one in Antrim Area Hospital even spoke to us about C difficile or my mother's condition.
45. The staff just said that we would have to speak to the consultant but getting an appointment was very difficult.
46. The nursing staff in A1 were better and supplied more information than the staff in B Ward. The nurse in A1 talked more freely whereas in B they always tried to refer you to the doctor.
47. I would just like them to realise that C difficile is a very serious condition especially for someone of elder age. We should have been phoned immediately they got a result. They had all our contact numbers and they should have given us the results of tests and also spoken to us before she was moved to a different ward. It was all very distressing for the family.
48. Once the hospital knew that she had C difficile we should have been given an appointment with the doctor and the issues should have been discussed and explained.

49. Not only were we not given any information about my mother's condition but we were also not given any information about hygiene precautions, hand washing or laundry.

Communication in Braid Valley Hospital

50. Communication was much better in Braid Valley Hospital and the staff even phoned us at home to discuss her condition. Our questions were always answered openly and freely by the nurses on duty and we always had access to a doctor. You did not have to make an appointment there. All of our family frequently spoke with the nursing and medical staff in Braid Valley Hospital.

51. We were also given a leaflet about C difficile which I have already referred to earlier on in my statement and there were notices about hygiene and cleanliness in the toilets and bathrooms.

52. In Braid Valley Hospital we were taken into a side room and spoken to on a one to one basis. We were always treated well and sensitively.

53. When she contracted the C difficile at Braid Valley Hospital they kept us fully informed throughout the process. We knew when the samples were being sent off, the results and when the samples were clear and as soon as they could they moved her back from the isolation room to the open ward. They were aware that she would recover better in the open ward situation rather than on her own in isolation.

54. The interaction with the staff and other patients aided and quickened the recovery process.

55. My mother is now much better. She is back to her old self. She is independent and she is actually the main carer for my father who needs a lot of help. She does however have very little memory of her period in hospital.

C difficile

56. I am a Ward Manager and so I did know about C difficile but I was only aware that she had it when she was transferred to isolation. I was not aware of any symptoms or diarrhoea prior to that date. She had diarrhoea for between seven and ten days during the whole time she was in isolation in Antrim Area Hospital. She then contracted it again perhaps one week after she was transferred to Braid Valley Hospital and her symptoms on that occasion lasted between one and two weeks. They had to wait for three clear samples before they transferred her back into the open ward.

57. The family were very worried and anxious about her condition. My father was distressed and we were worried about even being able to get her home again.

58. When she was leaving Braid Valley Hospital she was spoken to by the consultant, the social worker and the nurses.

Antibiotics

59. I believe she was on antibiotics when she first went into Antrim Area Hospital with her urinary tract infection. I think they were given intravenously at that time. It was given to her for perhaps five days.

60. I do not know what treatment she received when she contracted C difficile as no-one spoke to us.

Food

61. I have no comment to make about the food. My mother's condition was very low and her appetite was poor. She needed fluids and I tried to get her to drink. Braid Valley Hospital was certainly better at feeding her and giving her high protein and calorie drinks.

Summary and general comments

62. Regarding laundry of clothes I think I have already covered this. We were given the information at Braid Valley Hospital but nothing was given to us at Antrim Area Hospital.
63. Regarding cleanliness, we had concerns with B Ward. I would have concerns about cleanliness of the equipment, general hygiene and washing of hands there.
64. Regarding communication, this was very poor indeed at Antrim Area Hospital but much better in Braid Valley Hospital.
65. Regarding frequent transfer and isolation rooms, I think this had a detrimental effect on her condition because she deteriorated each time she was moved. We were also not informed of the moves.
66. Overall we feel as a family that we were very lucky that our mother survived this episode because physically and mentally she was very low.
67. She lost a dramatic amount of weight and mentally she was very distressed and confused. We were very concerned that she would not recover.
68. C difficile had a major impact on her physical and mental condition.
69. Thankfully because of the care, attention and rehabilitation that she received at Braid Valley Hospital she was able to recover. She is much better now that she is back home.

Conclusion

70. It caused me great distress as a nurse to see how my mother was being treated and looked after in Antrim Area Hospital. There was a complete lack of communication. As a family we were very angry and distressed.

71. They should not have put the extra bed into the ward. Overcrowding was an issue. The patients were much too close together.

72. I also felt that the patients were being moved far too often and that this could also have spread the infection.

I declare that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Caitlin McCoy.

Caitlin McCoy

Date1-9-10.....