



Witness Statement Reference No. _____

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

WITNESS NAME: MRS ELIZABETH ROBINSON

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE

I, Mrs Elizabeth Robinson, say as follows:

1. My name is Mrs Elizabeth Robinson and I live at an address which is known to the Inquiry Team.
2. I am the daughter of Mr Thomas Shaw who died on 21st July 2009 at Whiteabbey Hospital.

Pre-existing medical history

3. My father was a very healthy man for his age. He was 86 years of age when he died. He lived with my mother in a two up, two down house in Carrickfergus. He was physically fit and mentally alert.
4. He had pleural plaques but had only been in hospital on one previous occasion for a gallstone operation.
5. There was no care coming into the house and my mother and father managed on their own.
6. My mother died on 8th April 2008 and my father died on 21st July 2009.

Admission to Antrim Area Hospital

7. My father had a slight stroke on Sunday 25th May 2008. We normally meet at church on a Sunday but as he did not turn up I immediately went to his house but could not get in and so I contacted my brother in law who helped me gain access to the house when we found my father lying on the floor.
8. We phoned an ambulance which took him to Antrim Area Hospital. He was examined at Accident and Emergency Department and then admitted to Ward B where he stayed for a few days before he was transferred to Ward C. He was in Antrim Area Hospital for about one week in total.

Transfer to Whiteabbey Hospital

9. His condition was improving and so he was transferred to Whiteabbey Hospital for rehabilitation. He was doing very well and we thought that he was going to be sent home on 11th or 12th July when he suddenly became very ill and was transferred to a single isolation room. I was oblivious as to what was wrong with him.
10. Initially he was in an open six bedded ward but when the symptoms started he was transferred to a single isolation room. He was actually in three different isolation rooms which all had en suite toilet facilities.
11. He was in Whiteabbey Hospital for about three months in total and eventually got home again in September 2008.

Admission to Mater Hospital

12. He was at home for approximately six to nine weeks before he took ill again following which he was admitted to Mater Hospital. He had become dehydrated and started to hallucinate. He was not eating or drinking at that time. He was in Mater Hospital for about two months.

Joymount Nursing Home

13. He was then transferred from the Mater Hospital to Joymount Nursing Home in Carrickfergus where he stayed for between six to eight weeks. He very much liked being in Joymount Nursing Home. He was then admitted to the Mater Hospital for one day before being sent home but as he was not well the following day, we had to phone an ambulance which took him to Whiteabbey Hospital.

Whiteabbey Hospital

14. He was admitted to Whiteabbey Hospital shortly after Christmas and he stayed there for about six months until he died on 21st July 2009.
15. During this period of time he was in Ward 3, Ward 10 and then Ward 9 where he died.
16. I am not sure about his symptoms at that time but he was always wanting to go to the toilet. Every time I visited he was always telling the staff that he required the toilet again.

Visits

17. I personally visited my father once or sometimes twice a day when he was in hospital.
18. I was the main carer for my father and even when he was at home I visited him every day and on occasions I had to sleep overnight in his house as he constantly needed the toilet maybe five or six times a night. Although the care team came into the house during the daytime I could not get any care package that covered nights and so when he was at home I had to look after him at night. My sister sometimes came over from England to give me some respite.

C difficile

19. I had heard of C difficile from the television but I never associated the infection with my father. However my sister became aware that he had C difficile in or about June 2008. My father had been transferred to a single room and as my sister was suspicious about his condition she spoke to Dr Quinn who admitted that they thought that he had C difficile for about five weeks but they had not as yet got a positive test result.
20. We then looked up C difficile on the internet and got some further details of the symptoms and precautions. We actually downloaded this information and left a copy of it by his bedside so that we could warn everyone of his condition and what precautions they should take but the copies of this information that were left by his bedside were always removed. They were removed on more than one occasion.
21. My father did not eat well after he was diagnosed with C difficile and his weight decreased from about fifteen stone down to six stone when he died.
22. We were not told why he was transferred to isolation nor were we given any advice regarding precautions, hand washing, use of gels or anything else.

Care

23. I was not very happy with the care that he received at Antrim Area Hospital. Some of the nurses' uniforms were not clean and some had a poor attitude. When my father was admitted to Antrim Area Hospital they did not even have a pillow for his bed so I went and purchased two at Tesco's in Antrim. When I brought them to the hospital they did not even have pillow cases to put them in. He was only in Antrim Area Hospital for about one week when he was moved to Whiteabbey Hospital where the care was much better. I was very happy with the way in which the nurses looked after him in Whiteabbey Hospital.
24. However I felt that the doctors in Whiteabbey Hospital did not communicate with us. One day my sister waited for three and a half hours to speak to a

doctor before being told that he had gone home. We had a lot of difficulty getting any information from the doctors in Whiteabbey Hospital about our father's condition and they even told us that they could not provide the information because it was a breach of confidentiality for them to do so. They apparently suspected that he had had C difficile for five weeks before he was diagnosed with it. We were very disturbed and frustrated by the doctors saying that it was a breach of confidentiality not to give us the information as it was our father who was ill. We got very little information from the doctors about our father's condition or his prognosis.

Medication

25. I do not know what medication he was taking but he was on antibiotics. He was on a drip at Whiteabbey Hospital. He was dehydrated and was very confused. We even had to ask Whiteabbey Hospital to monitor his liquid intake and output as we were worried that he was not taking enough fluids. The nurses were very good to my father but we had issues with the treatment that he was receiving. We were not convinced that he ever got the correct treatment for his C difficile.

Understaffing

26. I think that the hospitals were understaffed. I was sorry for the nurses because they were being pushed and pulled and were having to rush everywhere. I heard bells and buzzers ringing all the time for attention and they had to work very hard. I was visiting him twice a day and saw how hard they were working.

Cleanliness

27. The cleanliness in Antrim Area Hospital was appalling. The nurses' uniforms were dirty and stained. One of them also had terrible body odour. The floors were not particularly clean.

28. The Mater Hospital would not have been clean either. The floors were stained and a pillow was left lying on the floor beside my father's bed for four days and was not removed and so I asked myself how well the floor must have been cleaned at that time if the pillow had not been removed.
29. The cleanliness of Whiteabbey Hospital was very good. The floors, lockers, walls and everything else were all clean.

Laundry

30. I was responsible for my father's laundry in all three hospitals. At Whiteabbey Hospital and Mater Hospital the laundry was normally left for me in a biodegradable bag which I put straight into the washing machine. I was eventually given some instructions from the hospital as to how to launder the clothes in that that they should be washed separately and at a high temperature but I was very annoyed not to have received this information at an earlier date and at the start of his C difficile infection. What really annoyed me is that I had been taking the clothing home and washing them with our own clothes before I was told that he had C difficile and given any information regarding the washing.
31. I had actually been washing his clothes with the rest of the family wash and was putting children's clothes in with his pyjamas and other clothing. If the hospital had suspected that he had C difficile for five weeks then they should have informed me immediately and advised me about what precautions we should take for our own protection and in particular I should have been advised regarding the laundry.
32. Once I was told about the C difficile I took his clothing to his own house and used it in his own washing machine just to make sure that I was not mixing his clothing with our own.

Protection

33. I noticed staff at Whiteabbey Hospital and Mater Hospital wearing plastic gloves and aprons.
34. There were gel dispensers and the family always used them but we did not get any advice regarding their use or that we should always wash our hands.
35. There were sufficient numbers of chairs and we never sat on the beds.
36. He was able to get to the bathroom with assistance although later on he had to use a commode. The commode was always taken away after use. The single isolation room had an en suite toilet.

Communication

37. We never received any pamphlets, brochures or other written information from the hospital.
38. We had several discussions with the doctors about my father's illness and condition but C difficile was very seldom mentioned. It was as if it was a bad word and they did not want to discuss it with us. I was never given any prognosis. I was distraught because he was so ill. We should have been told about his condition sooner. My understanding is that four or five tests were carried out before they got a positive result but I am still annoyed that they had suspicions but did not share these with us or give us any advice or information at an earlier date.
39. When my father was put into an isolation room he was exhibiting symptoms of C difficile. He had difficulty in communicating, he was just lying in bed crying, he was very weak and thought he was dying. I went to find a doctor but had terrible difficulty finding one or getting any information.
40. I think that the family should be given full and frank information. I should have been told what was wrong with him and the treatment that he was receiving. I found the whole situation very distressing.

41. The doctors should have called us into a room, explained their suspicions, advised us regarding the treatment and precautions and kept us fully informed. The fact that they had suspicions that he had C difficile for five weeks and did not inform the family is despicable.
42. The doctors never approached us, we had always to go looking for them.
43. The family were delighted when he was moved to Ward 10 at Whiteabbey Hospital because the communication was much better there. Dr Gray was excellent and did everything he could to help my father but it was too late.

Weight loss

44. My father was a fit, healthy fifteen stone man when he went into hospital but over a period of one year and two months his weight decreased to about six stone because of his condition.

Death Certificate

45. I was told that they could not put C difficile down as one of the causes of death on the Death Certificate unless my father had a post mortem. The family were so distressed at the time that we decided to accept this situation as we could not face having a post mortem.
46. However the whole family feel that my father never recovered from the C difficile infection. He had difficulty eating and never stopped asking to go to the toilet. We feel that the C difficile contributed to his death because he never recovered from it.

Food

47. I cannot make any comment regarding the food as my father refused to eat. He just waved it away. The nurses tried to get him to eat but he would only take a couple of mouthfuls.

Conclusion

48. I think that the hospital should have been more upfront and honest with the family. I would have liked more information to have been given regarding his condition. We should not have been told that it was a breach of confidentiality to give us the information. The communication was terrible and it was as if C difficile had become a swear word to the hospital staff.
49. I declare that this statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated

Signed

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Mrs Elizabeth Robinson.

Mrs Elizabeth Robinson