



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

WITNESS NAME: KEN GILLILAND

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE

I, Ken Gilliland, aged 55 years say as follows:

1. I am the son of Langford Gilliland who is 96 years of age. My father contracted Clostridium Difficile ("C diff") at Whiteabbey Hospital in September 2007 when an in-patient there. In this statement I recite my own recollection of that time and any conversation I recall having with my father in respect of what was happening to him then. I am making this statement at my father's request because he has suffered two strokes since his discharge from Whiteabbey Hospital in 2007 and is unable to communicate directly himself with the inquiry.

2. Due to my father's current condition he now resides in a nursing home. Previously he lived by himself in his own home and was mobile – he drove a car and was able to care for himself. However in June 2007 he was admitted to the Royal Victoria Hospital ("RVH") to undergo a bypass operation on his right lower leg. While there he suffered a heart attack and also contracted MRSA so he was quite 'poorly' but he recovered enough to be then sent to Whiteabbey Hospital for rehabilitation although he still had an open wound on his calf.

Admission to Whiteabbey Hospital

3. In early September 2007 he was transferred from the RVH to Ward 9 of Whiteabbey Hospital. Ward 9 is in a single storey building and leads directly into Ward 10 – it is necessary to walk through Ward 9 to reach Ward 10. My father was admitted to either the first or second single room on the right of Ward 9 and the room had its own separate bathroom attached.
4. My impression of Ward 9 was it that it was a rehabilitation ward as opposed to a medical one as there were cooking facilities and a meeting room for patients. There were a number of single rooms in that ward and then more open bays but I think the majority were single rooms.
5. The reason my father was placed in the single room was because he was being tested for MRSA. My recollection is that he had recovered from the MRSA infection he had contracted in the RVH but that Whiteabbey Hospital wished to assess him themselves to ensure that he was clear of it. As far as I remember those tests for MRSA were negative. Throughout this stay at Whiteabbey my father was not transferred to any other room or ward.
6. I visited him most weekdays and at the weekends as well. My visits would normally be in the afternoon.

Diagnosis of C diff

7. I understand that within a fortnight or so of being admitted to Whiteabbey Hospital my father was diagnosed with C diff. He complained to me a number of times of the increased frequency of trips he needed to make to the toilet. It became quite serious and I enquired of nursing staff why this was happening. I was then told that he was suffering from C diff and was being treated with antibiotics. This was mid September 2007. I am aware that he did not require to use a commode at any stage.

8. My father had been receiving antibiotics due to having an open wound on his calf from surgery. Larvae were also being applied to the wound. He was receiving antibiotics via a drip, but I am unsure whether that was for the C diff condition as well.
9. Regarding the diagnosis of C diff, it is disappointing that nobody actually ever sat down with me and said “Your father’s contracted C diff and this is how we are going to deal with it” or “This is what is happening” or “This is what could happen”. I actually discovered how serious the C diff infection can be by my own research. At that time however my father was able to communicate properly so he was communicating directly with doctors himself and I was not as up to date on what was happening as he was.
10. I do not know myself about the other patients in the ward contracting C diff, but my father did say to me on one occasion “there’s a lot of people with this bug”, referring to other people in Ward 9.

Communication

11. The reason I wish to give a statement to the inquiry arises from the lack of communication by Whiteabbey staff about the C diff diagnosis. I am disappointed about the amount of information that was provided to me. I was unable to make contact with a doctor to discuss my father’s conditions – at the time I wanted to discuss both the fact that his open wound was not healing and to a lesser extent the C diff infection. I found it impossible to get a doctor to speak to as they were not based in the ward. It is very remote from the main hospital building and I was told by nursing staff that the doctors did not have a set time to attend and came down on a random basis. I asked to see a doctor many times and was told “the doctor may be down later”. My impression was that in order to speak to the doctor I had to await one appearing in the ward. I never had the opportunity of speaking to a doctor during my father’s first stay at Whiteabbey.

12. I was not given any leaflet regarding C diff nor any information in respect of the infection.

Isolation and hygiene precautions in Whiteabbey Hospital

13. My father was isolated in a room on his own throughout his first stay at Whiteabbey. However the isolation procedure in practice was quite lax. Other than the normal notices in any hospital about hand washing, I was not told of any specific need to wash my hands nor told of the danger of contamination or the contagiousness of C diff. My father has never mentioned to me that he received any information either on the precautions to take. I did use hand gel when arriving and leaving and occasionally may have washed my hands but that was part of my normal routine in visiting my father in hospital.
14. My step-sister washed my father's laundry and she would be better placed to give a statement of evidence in relation to whether she was told how to deal with it. She has recently told me that the clothing was frequently in such a soiled state that she required to throw it out. I will ask her if she is prepared to provide a statement to the inquiry.
15. I do recall that when my father was suffering from C diff the nurses wore gloves when they were handling him but I am not certain whether they wore aprons. The support staff who delivered meals wore gloves and on occasions aprons as well. As I did not see any doctors I am unaware of what they wore.

Cleanliness in Whiteabbey Hospital

16. Due to my visiting pattern I was not there whenever cleaning was carried out. But my father did make comments to me at times that the standard of cleaning was not sufficient. He would be fussy about cleanliness and told me "They haven't moved that bed for two or three days to brush below it". I consider that Ward 9 is not a modern facility and while not necessarily grubby it is a difficult ward to keep clean. In my opinion it would therefore be more likely to harbour viruses and such like in it. It is my view that the building in

which Ward 9 is housed is not fit for its purpose due to its age. I have no other specific criticism of the cleanliness of the room in which my father was placed, apart from its age rendering it unsuitable. There was no odour noticeable to me in either my father's room or in the corridor.

Re-admission to RVH and isolation there

17. At the end of September or beginning of October 2007 my father had an appointment at the RVH with a vascular surgeon in connection with the surgery that had been carried out to his leg. On seeing my father's condition, both the state of his leg wound and the C difficile infection, the surgeon readmitted him. I specifically recall the surgeon stating to me "the Sister is not going to be happy with me because I am admitting somebody with C diff, but I have to keep him here". I cannot recall the surgeon's name.
18. My father was placed in isolation immediately. A warning notice was placed on the door and it was stressed that visitors required to wash hands and were not to touch him. The RVH provided much more information than Whiteabbey Hospital regarding the necessary precautions to take. Both the Sister and the nurses on the ward in RVH provided information verbally. Gloves were available for visitors, although I did not use them as I washed my hands and also used the gel scrub.

Re-admission to Whiteabbey Hospital

19. My father was transferred back to Whiteabbey Hospital in or around November 2007 and admitted to Ward 10. This was to recuperate from his leg operation as he had by then recovered from C diff. He remained there for a short period of time and was then discharged to a nursing home in Rathcoole where he stayed for four or five weeks.

Overall effects of C diff

20. My father lost approximately one and half stone in weight from his initial admission to the RVH until he was eventually discharged home. This I understand was as a result of his entire medical condition and not solely the C diff infection. He also became very depressed. He is normally an optimistic man and the entire experience dragged him down. To be fair, I cannot say that this was caused solely by C diff but the infection certainly did not help his mental state because once he had arrived at Whiteabbey the first time he had thought that there was a possibility of getting home. To then develop another illness was very tough for him. He has conveyed that to me- that he went into hospital for an operation thinking he was going to come out fine but contracting other illnesses in both hospitals was very disappointing and difficult to handle mentally.
21. As far as I recall he suffered from C diff for approximately one month to six weeks. However he has told me that his bowel motions have remained much "looser" than they were prior to his initial admission to RVH in July 2007. I have no medical knowledge and cannot comment on why that is although initially I had thought myself it was perhaps as a result of the medication he now requires to take.

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

Signed

Signature Protected

Date:

30/4/2019