



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

Witness name: Mrs Stella Esler

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE

I, Mrs Stella Esler, say as follows:

1. My name is Mrs Stella Esler and I live at an address which is known to the Inquiry Team. I am the daughter-in-law of Mrs Rachel Esler who died on 17th April 2008 at Belfast City Hospital. I am now retired but I was a nurse for 20 years and used to work at Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

2. **Pre-existing medical history**

My mother-in-law was 90 years of age when she died on 17th April 2008.

About two years prior to her death she was diagnosed with carcinoma of the bladder and myeloma of the spine. She was receiving radiotherapy at Belfast City Hospital. Later on her kidneys malfunctioned and she admitted to Belfast City Hospital in January 2008 for emergency dialysis. She was living at home with her grandson ^{EWAN (St)} Ian, who was 32 years of age. She was mobile and alert but was able to manage with some help and support from the family.

However, for the two years between 2006 and 2008 she was getting quite a lot of treatment from Belfast City Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital. She was actually being admitted to Antrim Area Hospital roughly every six to eight weeks for blood transfusions.

3. **Admission to Antrim Area Hospital**

She was admitted to Antrim Area Hospital on 3rd March 2008 to Ward A3 which was the Oncology ward where she was put into a 6-bedded room. She was in the first bed to the right hand side as you go through the door.

4. The bed was very close to the sink and as people were coming in and washing their hands, the family felt that some water was splashing on to her bed and that the paper towels were sometimes discarded on the floor near her bed. I am making this comment now as the family felt that this bed was too close to the sink and that there was risk of infection because of the splashing and washing of hands in the close vicinity to her bed.

5. **Phone call**

On Sunday 9th March 2008 I received a phone call from the hospital to say that my mother-in-law had developed C-Difficile and was being transferred to Ward A1. I believe the caller also told me that A1 was where all the patients were being nursed who had C-Difficile.

6. **Ward A1**

My mother-in-law was in bay 1 of ward A1. There were four beds in that bay and she was in the second bed on the right hand side as you go into the bay. It was a single sex bay.

7. **Symptoms**

She had developed diarrhoea and vomiting but she was drinking a lot and improved sufficiently for her to be allowed home on 4th April. However, when she came home she developed a kidney problem and had to be admitted the same day to Belfast City Hospital.

8. **Belfast City Hospital**

She was admitted to Belfast City Hospital, Floor 11 to a single room. She was in a single room because it was the only bed available and not because of C-Difficile. She was in this room until she died on 17th April 2008.

9. **Death Certificate**

C-Difficile had nothing to do with her death. She was completely clear of C-Difficile when she was discharged from Antrim Area Hospital.

10. **Visits**

We visited every day and sometimes twice a day. There were visitors with her every afternoon and evening. We would only visit during regular visiting hours.

11. **C-Difficile**

I had heard of C-Difficile on the television and news. I knew basically what it was but I did not know very much about it. I was very worried after I had received the phone call from the hospital because I knew that a number of people had died after contracting the infection.

12. I do not think that we were given any written information by the hospital but we were given plenty of verbal advice and information by them. The nurse on Ward A1 was very good at giving advice, telling us to wash our hands and use the gel. We were also told to wear the aprons and gloves. My mother-in-law's visitors always complied with these requirements and procedures.

13. As far as I was concerned there were plenty of chairs to sit on and if you needed another chair then there were extra ones in the TV room on the ward.

14. **Visitors**

There were four patients in my mother-in-law's bay and three of the families complied with the protocols and procedures but unfortunately one family was defiant and refused to follow the rules. They refused to wear gloves and aprons and sat on an easy chair when they were asked by the staff not to do so as this was supposed to be for the patients' sole use so as to try and prevent the spread of infection.

15. Visitors were also supposed to be restricted to two per bed at any one time but once again this family did not comply with this requirement.

16. I thought it was unfair to the patients and unfair to the nurses and staff that this family did not comply with the rules. I thought there should have been some senior infection control nurse or manager who could and should have enforced the protocol procedure and spoken to this family about keeping to the rules.

17. **Laundry**

The washing of the laundry was explained to us and we were also given the biodegradable bags. I put the bag with the clothes in it into the washing machine and at the end all you were left with were the clothes and two pink straps which had previously been attached to the bag.

18. **Care**

I was very happy with the care that she received. She was always very content with the care provided by the staff. We were happy with the attention that she was getting and with the attitude of the staff. The staff were very friendly to us and always explained what was happening. They explained and discussed her symptoms, condition and treatment. She was receiving

antibiotics for her condition and she also had some physiotherapy at Antrim Area Hospital. The care was very good and the staff was very kind to her.

19. **Cleanliness**

The cleaners were cleaning the wards twice a day. They even had to raise the beds up so that they could clean underneath the bed. I saw them cleaning the beds, lockers, tables, headboards, window sills and floors. I would describe the ward as being very clean. I never noticed any smell or odour about the ward or the hospital.

20. My mother-in-law was not able to get to the bathroom but she was able to wash herself when they brought her a basin of water. She was always clean and tidy and her hair was always brushed. The family were very happy with her own personal hygiene.

21. The nurses wore uniforms, aprons and gloves. They changed the gloves as they moved from patient to patient. I saw them cleaning the thermometers and blood pressure equipment after use on each patient and was happy with this attention to detail.

22. I would say that the ward was spotless. It was really very good.

23. **Communication**

I was not given any leaflets or notices about the infection but there were notices on the notice board advising visitors to wash their hands and use the gel. The verbal information from the staff was also very good. As I have already said, we were given information the day that she was admitted with C-Diff to Ward A1.

24. We were always kept informed throughout of the tests that were being done and the results. They were sending samples to the laboratory for testing every

day. We were fully informed of her condition and treatment and were given regular updates.

25. **Food**

My mother-in-law was a small eater and was quite happy with the food and even got her porridge in the morning.

26. **Transfers**

One point that I would like to draw the attention of the panel to would be the fact that when my mother-in-law was moved from Ward A3 to Ward A1 that she was actually moved in her bed in A3 to A1 and that an empty bed in A1 was then moved to A3. Now as far as I am concerned the bed in A1 might have been infected and I thought that it was wrong for beds to be moved about in this way as it could potentially spread the infection to another part of the hospital.

27. **Conclusion**

I feel that the visitors should have to comply with the safety procedures and protocols. The rules are for everyone's good and should be told that they must abide by the rules and protocols.

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

Signed: SIGNATURE PROTECTED

Dated: 29-06-10.....