

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

**Witness Name: Stewart Black**

Statement of Evidence

I, Stewart Black, say as follows:

1. My name is Stewart Black and I live at an address which is known to the Inquiry Team. I am a son of Mrs Sarah Black who died on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007 at Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt.

2. Pre-existing medical history

My mother was a very fit woman for 87 years of age. She got up in the morning and made my father and her grandson their breakfast. She did her own shopping and cooking and was completely independent. She was fit and mobile and had never been in hospital before. She also looked after the accounts for the farm in that she paid the bills, signed the cheques and completed the VAT forms.

3. Reason for admission to hospital

My mother complained to me in the early stages that an hour or two after she had taken her breakfast that she used to vomit it up again. I left it for a week or so but as she was still having this problem, I decided to have her examined by the GP. He could find nothing wrong with her but as the problem continued, he recommended that we take her to hospital.

4. Mid-Ulster Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital

We took her to Mid-Ulster Hospital in mid-August 2007 and she was there for about two weeks while some tests were carried out. She was then transferred to Antrim Area Hospital for a further week or ten days when they put a scope down her throat and carried out further tests. She was then transferred back to Mid-Ulster Hospital where she stayed for a further two weeks. She was back on solid foods at that time but then started to vomit again and was subsequently transferred back to Antrim Area Hospital.

5. We were told that whenever they had tried to make the opening wider that this had not been a success and so they were now suggesting that a stent be put in. This procedure was discussed with the family as the hospital was worried about my mother bleeding and at her age this could be serious.

6. I gave my permission for the stent to be put in but unfortunately it did bleed fairly badly. The bleeding stopped and after a period of about two weeks she was transferred back to Mid-Ulster Hospital where she eventually died on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

7. Wards

When she was in Mid-Ulster Hospital for two weeks she was in Ward 1 and when she was transferred to Antrim Area Hospital for the scope she was in a six-bedded room in Ward A where she stayed for a week or 10 days.

8. She was then transferred back to Mid-Ulster Hospital Ward 1 to the same bay but to a different bed for approximately two weeks before she was transferred back to Ward A in Antrim Area Hospital for the stent to be inserted. On this occasion she was put into a single room where she stayed for about two weeks.

9. She was then transferred back to Ward 1, Mid-Ulster Hospital where she was initially put into an open bay but then about 10 days before she died, she was

transferred to a single room in a different ward which was upstairs in the hospital.

10. None of these transfers were ever discussed with me or the family and it was not explained to us why she was being moved to a single isolation room.

11. Visits

I visited her every day and my daughter visited about every other day. Other members of the family also visited as often as possible and so she was getting a lot of visits from the family. The family only visited during regular visiting hours and would have stayed for the full duration of that time and so we were with her about one or two hours per day.

12. C-Difficile

I had never heard of C-Difficile before and the only information I obtained about it was from the television or media. I did not obtain any information whether written or verbal from the hospital.

13. Symptoms

I did not notice when my mother first developed diarrhoea. My mother used pads and so I did not notice any soiling of her clothes or nightdresses. Her clothing was left hanging at the end of her bed for me to take home and wash. It was not put inside any special laundry bags and I was never given any special instruction or advice on how to wash the clothes or what precautions to take.

14. Outbreak

I was never told by the hospital that there was an outbreak of C-Difficile. The only information I got was from the media. I was aware prior to my mother's

death that there was an outbreak of C-Difficile but I did not realise that it was at Mid-Ulster Hospital.

15. Care

I would say that my mother was looked after very well and that the nurses were all very good to her.

16. It was only about 10 days before she died which was when she was in the single isolation room at Mid-Ulster hospital that she started to complain to me that the nurses were taking the buzzer away from her and not giving it back. This appeared to disturb her and it also concerned me. I think that she was buzzing for attention as her pads needed constant changing. My mother even asked me to change them but I did not like to do so and so I spoke to the staff who said that they would attend to it in due course.

17. I was very happy with the care and attention that she received up until those last 10 days when I feel that she could have been given more attention and certainly the pads could have been changed more often. It appeared to me as if she was buzzing for assistance and that because she was buzzing so often that the staff were then taking the buzzer from her which caused her further annoyance and distress. She was not getting the help that she required at that time when she most needed it. In particular the staff were taking the buzzer away from her at night and dropping it down the side of the bed where she could not reach it.

18. My mother's condition was deteriorating. She was now requiring a bed pan and for this reason needed more care and attention for her condition.

19. Prior to this I was very satisfied with the care and attention that she was receiving. I was kept fully informed about what was happening and there was even talk of allowing her home with a care package but unfortunately this was not to be after she contracted the C-Difficile infection and was transferred to the single isolation room.

20. Cleanliness

I always felt that the hospital was clean, although I did not actually see any cleaning being done as I visited at regular visiting hours. I never noticed any smell or odour in either hospital.

21. My mother was always clean and tidy and her hair was always brushed. I was very pleased with the personal hygiene that she received. Her nightclothes were changed and left for the family to take home and clean.

22. There were hand basins and gel dispensers although I was never given any advice on hygiene precautions.

23. The nurses wore uniforms and also had aprons and gloves which they changed as they moved from patient to patient.

24. Overall I was happy with the hospitals, the wards, floors and everything else.

25. Communication

I did not receive any written notice, leaflets or anything else from the hospital regarding the C-Difficile outbreak nor did I see any notices on the notice board or on the walls.

26. The only information I got was from the media.

27. I was never told that my mother had C-Difficile nor was it ever discussed with me by any of the doctors or nurses.

28. I even had a one-to-one meeting with a Doctor (whose name I have made known to the Inquiry) in Mid-Ulster Hospital a few days before my mother's death to discuss her condition and he told me at that time that, "She is not going to make it." But there was no mention of her having contracted C-Difficile.

29. Neither I nor any member of my family were told that she had C-Difficile and no guidance, advice or instruction was ever given regarding hygiene precautions or the washing of her laundry.
30. Her underclothes and nighties were left in a bag by the bed and we were taking them home, washing them and bringing them back, not knowing that she had C-Difficile or that we should be washing them separately.
31. I feel very hurt that I was not told that my mother had C-Difficile and in fact I did not know that she had it until I was notified by the Public Inquiry months later. I think that the lack of information given by the hospital is a serious omission.

32. Improvements

Hindsight is a wonderful thing but I do feel that she was in hospital for far too long. Too much time was wasted and it took too long to complete the tests. There were too many transfers between Mid-Ulster Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital and too many delays. My mother was a healthy woman when she went in and she should have been dealt with much quicker than she was. She should have been in and out of hospital in a much shorter time.

33. We were treated sensitively by the staff but I should have been told about the C-Difficile. I would like the hospital to be more open with me. I think information should be given automatically and voluntarily.
34. If they were testing her for C-Difficile then we should have been advised and if the test was positive then we should have been told the result.
35. I would like the hospital to be more open and transparent. I would like the doctors to come to the family and let them know what is happening. There should be more information and interaction between the hospital and the relatives.

36. I found it to be very hurtful to hear afterwards that my mother had died with C-Difficile and not to have been told this by the hospital at that time.

37. Death Certificate

I am deeply hurt by what it says on her death certificate. It states that the cause of death is (a) duodenal stenosis and (b) diverticular disease but it appears to me that she also died with C-Difficile and that this should also have been stated on the death certificate as a cause of death.

38. Food

I have no comment to make regarding the food.

39. General

It really annoys me that I may never have known or found out that my mother died with C-Difficile had it not been for a Public Inquiry.

The death certificate says one thing but then I find out from the Inquiry months later that she has contracted C-Difficile before she died but this has not been told to me by the hospital who were treating her. I find this extremely hurtful.

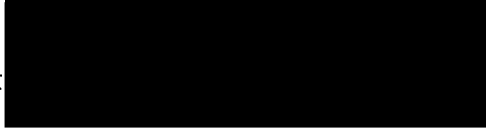
Not only did I lose my mother but five months after her death my father died.

There should be more and fuller communication and information given to patients and relatives regarding their condition and treatment.

I do not like going in and asking questions of the doctors and nurses but I do feel that they should offer more personal information, advice and instruction on a proactive basis.

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

Signed:



Dated: 2-9-2010