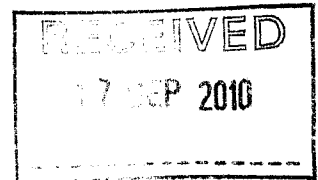


**WITNESS STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO OUTBREAK OF  
CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE IN THE NORTHERN TRUST HOSPITALS**

WITNESS NAME: TIM LOWRY

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE**



I, Tim Lowry, say as follows:

1. My name is Tim Lowry and I live at an address which is known to the Inquiry Team.

I am the elder son of Mrs Kathleen Mary Lowry who died on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 at Antrim Area Hospital.

I am a health care manager.

2. Pre-existing medical history

My mother was diagnosed in or about November 1996 with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and her spleen was removed in January 1997. She then had chemotherapy in or about April 1997 at Mid-Ulster Hospital.

3. Between 1997 and 2007 she was fine from a physical point of view, but following the death of my father in June 1999 she was broken hearted. She lived on her own in Magherafelt.

4. She was mobile but may have had osteoporosis. She had no car and had to rely on myself and friends for transport. She was quite independent, did her own cooking and cleaning and did not require any care or other assistance.

5. Admission to Antrim Area Hospital

Following a routine appointment with Dr Burnside at Antrim Area Hospital he noticed a drop in her blood pressure and was not happy with her condition and so she was admitted to Ward A in Antrim Area Hospital on or about the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2007.

6. She was there for a total of about five weeks up until her death on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2007. However during this five week period she was allowed out for respite care and on two occasions she came to my home for a couple of days and on another occasion she was able to go to my brother's house in Edinburgh and stay with them for five days.

7. She was also transferred to Abbeyfield on the Cregagh Road, Belfast to be close to home during this period. I think that she went there on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June for four days. She sent me a text when she was there saying that she was very happy and that she had had a fantastic night, a lovely meal and that they were all fantastic people.

8. After four days she did however become unwell. She was suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting. She had a vile green discharge. The out of hours doctor examined her and with the agreement of Dr Burnside she was transferred back to Antrim Area Hospital. This was very late on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

9. She was admitted through Accident & Emergency Department and then transferred back to Ward A. It was a tremendous boost to me to see that Anne Marie O'Neill was on duty. She was a night sister in Ward A and I have great admiration and respect for her.

10. My mother was initially put into an open bay, but on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007 she was transferred to a single room. Before transferring her to the single room the staff phoned me at home to say that she was deteriorating and that they were making arrangements to transfer her to a private room.

11. I immediately rushed to the hospital where I spoke to Dr Burnside who told me that my mother had C difficile. I immediately contacted other members of the family to inform them of the gravity of the situation.

12. Ambulance

She was admitted to Antrim Area Hospital by ambulance and I must say that they acted extremely professionally and were very nice and helpful to her. I actually wrote a letter to the Medical Director of the Ambulance Service praising his wonderful staff and explaining how caring and professional they had been with my mother and myself.

13. Wards

During her five week stay in Ward A she was in two different six bedded bays before she was transferred to the single room on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, which was the day before she passed away.

14. Abbeyfield

The family felt that her move to Abbeyfield was a positive step in the rehabilitation process. Unfortunately her symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting started on her fourth day there and these symptoms continued up until her death some five days later. The symptoms started on a Thursday and she died on a Tuesday.

15. Understaffing

On the Saturday night before her death I was visiting her in Ward A with my daughter. We were there from about 9.30 p.m. up until 12.30 a.m. and during that time my mother was in great distress. She was vomiting, in pain and needed medication. I had to leave my 14 year old daughter holding a kidney dish for my mother to be sick into while I went and looked for a doctor or

nurse to attend to her. It appeared to me that there were only two nurses on duty to look after the whole ward and only one doctor on call who arrived three hours later to administer the medication. Everyone was under severe pressure and there did not appear to be enough staff on duty.

16. Visits

I was the most frequent visitor and visited my mother in hospital as often as I could. Other members of the family would also have visited her there. I did not necessarily stick to the regular visiting hours and the staff were very understanding about my visiting times.

17. C Difficile

I had a passing knowledge and understanding of C difficile. I knew that it was a bacteria and that it existed in the intestines. I did not however receive any leaflets or pamphlets from the hospital and the only information I received was verbal and told to me by Dr Burnside. He told me that my mother had C difficile when she was being transferred to the single isolation room, which was only the day before she died. This explained to me the vile green discharge that I had noticed she was having. I was not given any specific details or advice, but I always remember Dr Burnside using the gel dispenser and constantly cleaning and rubbing his hands. I endeavoured to do the same thing and was very careful regarding my cleanliness and hygiene. There was no information on the television or radio at that time.

18. Care

Her nursing care from all the staff was exemplary. They were all angels. The staff were brilliant with my mother and she waxed lyrical to me about how good they were. Dr Burnside was also excellent. He looked after my mother very well and my father had held him in very high esteem. He was very professional in everything that he did.

19. Cleanliness

I saw the cleaners cleaning things that you would not automatically expect them to be cleaning. They were cleaning rails, curtains, shelves and other items which were six or seven feet off the ground. They were dusting them down and wiping them clean. The cleaning seemed to be very thorough. The wards and toilets were all very clean and I never noticed anything lying on the floor. The staff also wore gloves and aprons. I never saw any spillages nor was there ever any smell or odour about the hospital.

My wife took the laundry home for cleaning, but I do not think that she was ever given advice or guidance regarding the washing of my mother's clothing.

20. Communication

As I have already said I did not receive any notices, leaflets or pamphlets from the hospital about C difficile, hygiene precautions, washing of clothes or anything else. I do think however that there were some notices on the walls advising you to wash your hands and use the gel dispensers.

I was always treated very well and sensitively by the staff and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them all. They were utterly professional.

It took me a year after my mother's death before I could go back into Ward A to thank them all for everything that they had done for my mother and my family. They were always friendly, helpful, open and straightforward.

21. Death Certificate

The cause of death on the death certificate was non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, but I have always wondered why C difficile was not mentioned. I was too busy with the funeral and other arrangements at the time, but I now wonder whether C difficile was a contributory factor in my mother's death.

22. Food

The food was spot on. My mother never complained and was always happy with the food.

23. Generally

I thought that the staff were outstanding. They were extremely professional and I would call it role model behaviour for the NHS.

One thing that did annoy me however was that on occasions as my mother did not drive, she had to take a taxi to the hospital at a cost of approximately £20 which was then reimbursed by the hospital, but after she passed away I was extremely shocked and upset to receive a letter from the finance department asking me to repay around £120 for this expense as my mother had not been entitled to credit. The letter was crass and to receive it after your mother had died was in my opinion inappropriate and upsetting. I am raising this now just in case other families are getting similar letters and if so then this practise should be discontinued.

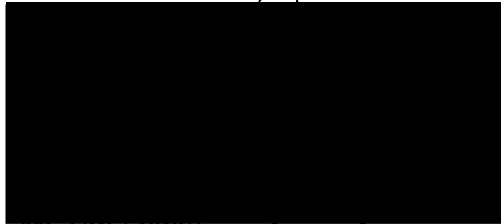
The only other point that I would like emphasise would be the apparent understaffing in the hospital. I have already referred to the fact that the staff were extremely professional, but on the Saturday night before my mother died and when she was in need of medical attention and treatment, there only appeared to be two nurses on duty to cover the whole ward and only one junior doctor covering far too many wards. There were far too few staff on duty that night and staffing levels were not adequate or appropriate.

There was also a mission statement on the walls stating that they wanted to treat the patients like one of the family. Well sadly that night this did not happen.

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

Dated this <sup>14</sup> day of ~~SEPTEMBER~~ 2010

Signed

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area.

Mr. Tim Lowry