PENROSE INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF

PROFESSOR CHARLES FORBES

IN RELATION TO IMMUNOLOGICAL TESTING IN GLASGOW

1. BMJ article, published on 15 October 1983, and entitled "Immunological abnormalities in haemophilia: are they caused by American factor VIII concentrate?"

1.1 This bit of evidence starts in the early part of 1983 when it was apparent that a variety of investigators had been finding some evidence of immunological abnormalities in patients with haemophilia, for example see references (1) Kessler CM et al, Lancet 1983, pages 991-992, (2) Ammann AJ et al, 1983 Lancet pages 956-958, (3) Lederman MM et al, New England Journal of Medicine 1983, volume 308, page 79-83

1.2 All of these papers suggested that immunological abnormalities were occurring in patients who had received multiple infusions of Factor VIII and IX concentrate. We therefore undertook to look at our own patients to see if any abnormalities were occurring in them as a result of concentrate infusion. This indeed we did find and we thought there might be an association with the use of Factor VIII concentrates. The co-authors of the paper, Drs Froebel, Madhok, etc all worked within the Haemophilia Centre at Glasgow Royal Infirmary and in the related section of Immunology of that Department.

1.3 The paper that we eventually published was entitled "Immunological abnormalities in haemophilia: are they caused by American factor VIII concentrate?" and the paper consisted of some tests carried out in patients with haemophilia who had had multiple infusions over many years and, in addition, some laboratory based testing using in-vitro systems with the addition of various agents including Factor VIII.

1.4 When a variety of our unselected patients were compared against controls, there was a very significant diminution in the numbers of T4 helper cells and this reached conventional levels of significance. It is to be admitted that the groups were not large enough to be just haemophiliacs treated with one or other of the various blood products which were available and indeed there were two patients who were homosexuals, so looking back at this study one could criticise the small numbers in each individual group and it must cast some doubt about the conclusions at that time.

1.5 These 19 patients were all treated at the Haemophilia Centre at Glasgow Royal Infirmary but all had had different treatments over the preceding years. The purpose of the study, of course, was to find out if there was any evidence that patients who had had multiple transfusions with various products had any evidence of alteration of their immunological status and I think that quite clearly they did. The patients were aware that studies were being carried out as blood was asked for but they were not informed in great detail of the implications of the study. I don't think they were ever told that there were implications because I am not sure that we knew if there were implications or not.

1.6 The observations in this paper are consistent with the observations in other papers as already indicated. They pointed, in our view, towards some suppression of the immune response in patients who were having multiple transfusions. The conclusion was that we didn't think that the abnormalities were specifically due to anything in the American Factor VIII concentrates.

2. Lancet article, published on 22 December 1984, and entitled "HTLV-III seropositivity in European haemophiliacs exposed to factor VIII concentrate imported from the USA"

2.1 This is in fact a very different study from the previous one and you will note by this date that a test had become available through the good offices of Dr Mads Melbye of Aarhus, Denmark and a range of other colleagues from the USA. We had by this time accumulated a variety of stored samples from the Scottish haemophiliacs that we had knowledge of and who attended Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The important thing is that we knew of their transfusion history over many years but the attraction of the collaborative study was that Dr Melbye had access to a test that had been verified as being specific for the virus causing Acquired Immune Deficiency which at that time was called HTLV-III, subsequently called HIV.

2.2 There are some other questions that you have asked which to the best of my memory I will try to answer. I am sure that the 77 patients in this study were in fact inclusive of the 19 patients that had already been looked at and whose samples were stored. I feel sure that all 77 patients will have been treated at the Glasgow Haemophilia Centre as we did not try to get samples from elsewhere. The purpose of the study was to try and find out how many patients in our whole population of patients were HIV positive although of course we did not get every patient that we did look after. The patients were aware that we were undertaking further studies of the infection although specific details were not spelt out to them. At that time it was not the policy of the unit to specifically get informed consent for each study that was carried out. The patients in the course of time were all told the result of what had been found, in particular those that were HIV positive were told and given specific instructions and counselling.

2.3 Once again, at that time, it was not the policy of the department to get specific consent from those who had been included in studies for the publication to be submitted to a medical journal. I don't think we have had any other publications.

3. In addition to the two studies mentioned above, were any other studies carried out on patients at the Glasgow Haemophilia Centre at this time? If so, please provide as much information as possible about the nature and outcome of the study(s) and references to publications where applicable.

3.1 I don't think we were undertaking any other studies which were published about that time.

4. We understand that early testing of blood samples (described by Professor Forbes in an earlier statement as "special samples") for anti-HTLVIII was carried out by Dr Mads Melbye at his laboratory in Denmark (and that subsequent testing was carried out by Dr Follett at Ruchill Hospital). Were the "special samples" referred to by Professor Forbes, samples from the patients in the two studies above? Are you able to confirm when the testing by Dr Melbye took place?

4.1 I do not remember in detail when the samples were taken but they must have been for some months prior to the testing date which was 1984 and these initial samples were all tested by Dr Melbye in Denmark. Subsequent to that, Dr Follett at Ruchill was given samples for local testing and that took place for many months thereafter.

5. Did you continue to study the patients once their anti-HTLVIII result was known? If so, please provide as much information as possible about the nature and outcome of the study(s) and references to publications where applicable. Was consent obtained from the patients for follow up studies?

Patients who were found to be positive were in fact tested to see if their positivity remained and this was done by Dr Follett and his colleagues at Ruchill. We were concerned to know whether the positivity was a transient phenomenon or whether they would become negative as they built up antibodies in the course of time. Sadly this did not happen and no protective antibodies seemed to be produced.

6. Other than the studies carried out by Professor Ludlam in Edinburgh, are you aware of any other similar studies that were undertaken in Scotland?

I am not aware of any other studies in Scotland being undertaken by any of the other Haemophilia Directors.

Professor Charles Forbes
9 June 2011