

People's Covid Inquiry February-June 2021
Citizen witness statement
Joanna Goodman

Session 1 24 February 2021

COVID-19: HOW PREPARED WAS THE NHS

STATEMENT

I (name) Joanna Goodman

Job title/ role/ occupation Co-founder, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice

will say as follows: _____

1. I make this statement for the purposes of the People's Covid Inquiry, which is to be held on 24 February.
2. I am able to attend and give evidence. If unable to attend, I agree to my statement being considered by the Inquiry.
3. What is your job/ role/ occupation – how long doing this for/ brief summary of background/ experience?

I co-founded the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group in April 2020, the same month I lost my father to Covid-19. I strongly believe that his death was preventable, and believed that bereaved families were entitled to answers on the failings that led to our loved ones' deaths. Most urgently, I believed that lessons had to be learnt to prevent other families from experiencing the pain and loss that we had been through. Our group has now grown to over 2,600 members, all of whom are personally bereaved.

4. What is your connection/ interest/ background/ experience relevant to the pandemic in England?

As above, my personal experience is that I have been bereaved by Covid-19. I have spent much of the past year speaking to other bereaved families, trying to understand their experiences and to try to ensure that lessons are learned. Specifically we have been campaigning for a statutory public inquiry into the handling of the pandemic, with a rapid review phase so that lives can be saved quickly. We first began calling for this early last summer ahead of the second wave.

5. How are you able to assist the Inquiry – what is your expertise/ knowledge/ specialism?

I can bring my own personal story of how my father contracted Covid-19 – we believe this was most likely to have been at an outpatients' hospital appointment the week before lockdown. I can also bring the experiences of other group members including those who have lost loved ones who were frontline healthcare workers, and those who believe that failings in pandemic preparedness, including within the NHS are the reason they lost their loved ones. Specifically, I can share our members' experiences of the Coronavirus Response Service (part of the 111 service set up at the start of the pandemic) and of the experiences of those whose loved ones contracted Covid-19 in hospital settings.

6. What in your view were the original vision and principles underpinning the NHS?

I believe the NHS was established to ensure equitable and free access to healthcare for all regardless of wealth and position in society.

Please briefly outline your testimony below or attach a page which will provide the panel with relevant information.

My father Stuart, 72, had heart failure, mild asthma and diabetes (though in remission). He was also undergoing diagnosis for Non-Hodkins Lymphoma. As such, as a family, we were hugely concerned about how vulnerable he was on hearing of the risk factors for Covid-19 and did our best to ensure he was shielded as far as possible. He was invited for an outpatients' hospital appointment on the 18th of March to receive his cancer diagnosis, less than a week before the UK went into lockdown. We had encouraged him to ask if the appointment could be conducted via telephone as there was no testing or treatment due to take place, but he was adamant that he didn't want to make a fuss and that it would be safe. Despite the fact that there was known widespread community transmission at this point, no precautionary measures had been put in place – staff had not been provided with PPE and the waiting room he had to sit in for an hour was crowded and poorly ventilated.

He received his diagnosis, went home and came back for the beginning of his chemotherapy treatment on the 24th of March. In the early hours of the 29th of March, he developed a high fever and lost his lucidity. He was taken to hospital by ambulance, and initially it was thought that he had an infection related to the chemotherapy treatment. The next day he returned a positive Covid test. It was a matter of three days from that point to him passing away. Thankfully, unlike many other families at that time, we were able to visit him in his final days, something we will be eternally grateful for.

I believe that too little was done too late to protect vulnerable patients like my Dad, and sadly it appears that many of these lessons still haven't been learnt as we still have new recently bereaved members joining our group on an almost daily basis who have lost loved ones to hospital-acquired Covid. We believe there are serious questions that need to be asked about the protections afforded to frontline workers and vulnerable patients.

Alongside my personal testimony, I would also like to share the experiences of our group members in relation to the NHS 111 service and the Coronavirus Response Service element which was commissioned at the start of the pandemic. We strongly believe that this service has been inadequate and failed on numerous occasions to identify those in need of hospital treatment due to inadequate training and overly rigid triage questions, amongst other things. After we flagged the

extent of issues experienced by our members in relation to this, the Guardian conducted an investigation and found much to verify our members' experiences as demonstrated by the articles below:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/21/covid-bereaved-call-for-inquiry-into-nhs-111-handling-of-crisis>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/22/it-has-been-a-trauma-nurses-on-shambolic-111-covid-19-clinical-service>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/01/nurses-barred-from-nhs-111-covid-clinical-service-after-60-of-calls-unsafe>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/sep/28/did-the-nhs-covid-helpline-fail-hundreds-of-families>

I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief:

Jo Goodman

21st February 2021

SIGNED

DATE

(Please return to Inquiry@keepournhspublic.com)

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