

Witness Name: Elizabeth Grant

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 21/02/24

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS IMPACT STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH GRANT

I, Elizabeth Grant, co-leader of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru (“CBFJ Cymru”) make this statement setting out my experience in losing my mother to Covid-19.

1. I am a wife, and a mother. I own my own business as a dog groomer and have done so for over 8 years. During the pandemic, I was unable to work throughout lockdowns.
2. I sadly lost my mother, Alfreda Frances Lawrence, better known as Betty, to Covid-19. My mother passed away on 19 April 2020 at the age of 86.
3. My mother was retired at the time of her passing. Prior to their retirement, around 1988, my mother and father were self-employed owners of retail businesses. My mother had worked as a seamstress before marrying my father. Having previously lived in Cornwall, my mother and father moved to Tintern in Wales in retirement. They wished to be near Bristol Airport for easy access to their holiday home in Tenerife, where they would spend the winter months of the year. My mother was an active bowls player in retirement, even representing both Cornwall and Monmouthshire Counties.
4. Despite leading a very active life, my mother did suffer with comorbidities. In 2016, my mother was diagnosed with vascular dementia. Following this diagnosis, my father, brother, and I were appointed as her attorneys under a Lasting Power of Attorney (“LPA”). My mother’s dementia, coupled with the fact that she suffered from arthritis, affected her mobility. She had expressed a love of dancing when young but needed to use a wheelchair for some periods as a result of her conditions. Despite this, we are grateful that my mother enjoyed a lengthy retirement before receiving her dementia diagnosis.

5. My mother was an amazing and selfless woman. She had a heart of gold and always gave unlimited assistance to others in need, often to her own detriment. My mother was the glue of our family, and we miss her dearly every day.
6. On 13 January 2020 my mother suffered a fall at home and sustained a broken hip. She was admitted to hospital where she underwent an operation to repair her hip. Following the successful completion of the operation, she was discharged to a community hospital on 28 January 2020 to continue her recovery and rehabilitation. My mother was discharged to home on 24 February 2020.
7. Following her discharge to home, my mother was not eating or drinking. My father was concerned and so called an ambulance a week after her discharge, on 2 March 2020. It was decided that my mother would be readmitted to hospital to assess her condition. As the country had not yet entered lockdown, we were still able to visit. However, we were concerned as we had heard from the news how the situation with Covid-19 was getting rapidly worse.
8. My Mother was deemed medically fit, and safe for discharge on 10 March 2020. My father wished for my mother to be discharged to home, as there were 3 able-bodied adults there that were able to provide her with care. The hospital refused this request multiple times, despite my father being the primary carer for my mother. They did not accept any package of care that could have made my mother's return to home possible due to the coming pandemic. She was instead discharged to a community hospital on 12 March 2020 for rehabilitation. We are of the belief that my mother was considered as being an involuntary bed blocker – she didn't need to be there anymore.
9. Following my mother's discharge to the community hospital, my father called the local care home manager and was able to persuade her to supply a care team that could facilitate my mother's safe discharge to home. This plan was put in place, and my mother was due to be discharged on 30 March with the new care package arranged by my father.
10. During my mother's time as an inpatient at the community hospital, the rules regarding visitation changed. As the country was not yet in lockdown during her first days there, visitation was permitted, but limited to one visitor per patient. These visits were primarily carried out by my father. My brother facilitated a call for me with my mother on 22 March, which was Mother's Day. This was the last time I was able to have a conversation with my mother. The hospital ward closed to visitors entirely on 23 March 2020 in line with lockdown. Following this, we received no communication from the community hospital on my mother's condition and care. My husband and I began calling the ward twice a day, as this was the only way we

could relay information to my father on my mother's condition. We called in the morning to speak with staff from the night shift and we called in the afternoon to speak with staff from the day shift. We were told that she was generally coping well.

11. On 31 March 2020, my mother's temperature spiked, leading to a delay in the discharge plans. My mother was tested for Covid-19 on the same day. She returned a positive result on 1 April. We are of the assumption that an untested hospital discharge is responsible for the spread of Covid-19 on the ward at the time my mother was an inpatient.
12. In light of the hospital's previous lack of communication, my father decided to drive to the hospital in early April and leave a phone at the hospital so that my mother could speak with us directly. There was no Wi-Fi in the hospital at all, but with the phone we could at least have a direct line of contact with my mother. However, this means of contact was also prevented by staff. Whilst the phone was not kept from my mother, it was placed out of her reach. When any member of the family attempted to call the phone, it would ring and ring with no member of staff helping my mother to answer it. Staff did not even attempt to charge the phone battery. After days of calling, the battery ran low until the phone eventually died, cutting off yet another line of contact between the family and my mother. This complete lack of empathy and care from staff left my family in worry and distress.
13. Some days following my mother's positive test result, the hospital informed us that my mother's condition was deteriorating. I asked a member of staff if there was a possibility of running a test to determine if my mother had any organ failure. I was told that no tests would be run, as the hospital would need to act on any issues found. This response shocked me – there was a clear disregard for my mother's best interests.
14. As a family, we spoke with a doctor and informed them that as holders of an LPA, we wanted my mother discharged to home as soon as possible. The doctor agreed to arrange this, but on the condition that my mother had to go for 12 clear days without a temperature spike before discharge could occur. My mother did experience one additional temperature spike, which delayed this process by a few days. She was eventually discharged on 17 April 2020.
15. An area of difficulty for my family through the pandemic was the messaging in different nations. I live near Bath, and so had to follow the rules as set out by the UK Government for England. My parents, living in Tintern, had to follow the rules as set out by Welsh Government for Wales. Living in England, we had no information at all on the position in Wales. When my mother started to become seriously unwell, I decided to go and stay with my father so that I could support both him and my mother after her discharge to home. I was, however, unsure if

the rules would permit me to do this. To obtain clarification, I called the police via the 101 service. I was connected to a member of an English police force. I informed them of my intention to travel to support my parents and asked them if I would be permitted to do so. They informed me that they did not foresee any problems with this plan and advised me to explain my situation if I were stopped. They did not seem fully confident with their advice on this topic and were not completely clear. I arrived for my mother's discharge on 17 April and stayed until 19 April.

16. By the point of discharge, my mother had already begun to receive end of life care, though it is not clear what this entailed while still at the community hospital. She was receiving medication due to her becoming agitated, but I also requested that she receive medication to help make the journey home more comfortable. Despite this request, my mother arrived in appalling condition. She was unresponsive to others but was screaming in pain. My father's reaction seeing her like this was unbearable – it was clear he had hoped that she would be okay with some love and care at home. By this time, my mother was past the point of no return. My Mother had not been tested for Covid-19 at the time of her discharge.
17. In the short few days of my mother receiving care at home, the community hospital did arrange for a visit from a hospice. We found ourselves needing to call a district nurse on one occasion as a result of the pain my mother was suffering. A district nurse attended and administered oramorph and midazolam intravenously. Other than these two visits, I became the primary carer for my mother in her final days. I personally nursed her and administered oramorph and midazolam two or three times before her passing. These medications were provided with her upon discharge but with no arrangement for a member of care staff to administer them. My mother passed away at 4.05 am on 19 April 2020.
18. I returned home on the afternoon of 19 April. As the country was still in lockdown, I was unable to work, which prevented me from having a natural distraction that I would have prior to the pandemic. My father also became unwell following my return home. My only way to keep in touch with him was via the telephone. This concern for my father, the distance between us and the lack of distraction amplified my grief. This was a particularly difficult time for me.
19. Following my mother's passing, I received copies of her medical notes from the community hospital. I discovered that an incomplete Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation order ("DNACPR") had been placed on my mother. Having discussed this with her previously, I know this is not what my mother would have wanted or agreed to. Additionally, it was noted that she was not to be transferred to an acute hospital. The hospital used her clinical frailty score, at this stage a 7, as justification for these decisions. These decisions were made without

any deterioration of her health and without any prior discussion with her LPA's or her family in general. The notes also highlighted several indicators of dehydration, but no fluids were given to counteract this. We were not aware of these issues until receiving my mother's medical notes.

20. The circumstances we faced after my mother's passing were particularly difficult. My father and I were fortunate that we were able to wash my mother ourselves and change her into more respectable clothing. Once my mother was taken from us, she was treated like toxic waste. The funeral directors put her straight into a body bag and took her away.
21. After contacting 2 different funeral directors, we were given the choice of either 10 people to attend a funeral in Lydney, Gloucestershire, or 5 people to attend a funeral in Wales. We instead opted for a direct funeral, which was to take place in Lydney. We did not feel that we could justify inviting such a limited amount of people. My mother would always say that her claim to fame was her time singing in a church choir with Dudley Moore. She would have wanted an element of religiousness. My father decided that it would be too difficult not to accommodate those who would want to be there. We decided to opt for a direct funeral and cremation in Lydney, which took place at 8.30am on 7 May 2020. Despite opting for the direct service, I travelled to and sat outside as the cremation happened. I promised my mother in her final hours that I would be with her at every step of her journey. Sitting outside was my way of keeping that promise. I was not permitted to enter the crematorium and so sat outside the main gates as it happened – the funeral director had previously advised us on the time it would take place. The service was photographed for myself and my family, but we were not made aware of an option to film it. We were informed that this was only an option if we had opted for a service with restricted numbers.
22. On 25 September 2021, when restrictions finally allowed, we held a celebration of my mother's life at her bowls club, where we spread her ashes. It took 18 months after her passing for us to have this celebration with all those who deserved to be there as a result of how long restrictions were in place for. It was difficult to wait so long to be able to properly mourn and celebrate my mother's life.
23. As a relative with an LPA, it was incredibly distressing to learn that a DNACPR order and an order preventing transfer to an acute hospital for treatment, had been placed on my mother on the basis of her frailty score. This decision was made without our input and was against the wishes of my mother and our family. There was no consultation at all, despite our family

keeping close communication with the community hospital and making it clear that we had power of attorney.

24. My mother was neglected. She caught Covid-19 in a community hospital , where she was supposed to be safe and was denied all basic forms of life support, even fluids and oxygen when needed. My mother was left to die. Myself and my family now live with survivors' guilt, wishing we had managed to find a way for my mother to be discharged from hospital to home. It seemed to be their way or no way. My children were left to say goodbye to their grandmother via a voice message. We have experienced death in a way that nobody should, and it has left us feeling traumatised. Losing someone under the circumstances of this pandemic and its lockdowns denies you all opportunities to grieve and obtain closure. The loss of my mother affects all aspects of our lives, and we feel her loss every day.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

PD

Signed: Elizabeth Ann Grant (Feb 21, 2024 16:33 GMT)

Dated: 21/02/24