

Witness Name: Tamsin Mullen

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: 0

Dated: June 2024

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY – MODULE 3

WITNESS STATEMENT OF TAMSIN MULLEN

1. My full name is Tamsin Mullen and my date of birth is the PD. I currently reside at Personal Data and I am a PD PD by occupation. I make this statement at the request of the Covid 19 Public Inquiry Module 3 Team. This statement has been taken following telephone calls, email exchanges and a Microsoft Teams Video meeting with Kim Louise Harrison, the Designated Legal Representative for the PBPO Group in Module 3. The matters stated within the following paragraphs are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.
2. Present with me when speaking with Kim on the Video Call was my husband Shayne Mullen, who has lived through all of these experiences with me, and whose voice I also want to try and get across in this statement. I can confirm that Shayne has also read this statement and agrees with its content.
3. Shayne and I have three children, a girl aged 9 and two twin boys aged 4.
4. Just before the start of lockdown I was pregnant with my twin boys. I knew that it was a complex pregnancy as when I was 8 weeks pregnant, I had an early scan and found out that I was having twins. I was high risk as I had had pre-eclampsia when pregnant with my daughter who also suffered from Intrauterine Growth Restriction (IUGR) (as did one of the twins), they therefore wanted to keep a close eye on me. The growth slowed down with one of the twins during my pregnancy and I was referred to a consultant specialist in multiple births. This was all pre

pandemic. At first, the hospital were doing 2 weekly scans and then I was told that I needed a weekly scan to measure the growth and fluids inside the womb. I started weekly scans around 10 weeks before the boys were born, this would have been around early February 2020.

5. By the beginning of February 2020, we all knew that Covid was abroad and most people thought at some point it was going to get here, therefore it was a very tense time in my pregnancy and the media coverage didn't help. Then for the last 4 scans, which included a period before formal lockdown happened in March 2020, Shayne, my husband, was no longer allowed to come into the anti-natal appointments with me at hospital and had to sit in the car because of Covid restrictions that the hospital put into place. I found this extremely distressing, as did Shayne. We lived 52 miles away from the hospital and I felt more and more uncomfortable, so Shayne had to drive me to the hospital. Our young daughter wasn't allowed at the hospital and so had to be left with family members for childcare.
6. Shayne at this time was also dealing with childhood trauma after receiving therapy, so and this was a very difficult time for the family and I wanted him with me at the scans.
7. I was scared every time that I went into the hospital to have a scan alone that I was going to hear some difficult news, and then have to relay that to Shayne. This was incredibly hard as we have always been together and have always done everything together and it is something you should not have to go through alone, you should have someone with you to support you. This caused me a huge amount of stress, fear and worry, as I already knew that my pregnancy was high risk and to go in and have scans alone without any support was incredibly difficult.
8. From Shayne's perspective, he has explained to me how being told that he couldn't come in made him feel, that he wasn't needed and the appointments could sometimes take a couple of hours, therefore he would be sat in the car worrying for all that time. It felt like the health service was saying to Shayne that he didn't matter and made him feel very excluded. The drive to the hospital was around 45

minutes so it was a long time to get there to then sit in the car and then to drive home.

9. In terms of the birth, because of it being a high-risk pregnancy I knew that I would be having a planned C-Section, but it was a planned category 2 C-Section because of the high risk. Eventually I was told on Friday 10th April that the babies needed to be born within the next 5 days. This was at a Friday lunchtime, and they didn't want me to a weekend case and so they booked me in for 7.30am on the Monday 13th April 2020 for a C-Section. I then had the pre-op with the surgeon on the Friday 10th April, all whilst Shayne was waiting in the car.
10. On the 13th April 2020, Shayne was allowed in with me from 7.30am to wait for the C-Section, and we went in at about 1.30pm and the boys were born at 2.03 and 2.06pm respectively. Shayne was allowed into the operating theatre for the birth as well. I remember that Shayne wore PPE but neither myself nor Shayne can recall being told to wear masks or offered any masks to wear. The boys were born at 34 weeks gestation.
11. As soon as the boys were born, they were taken away to NICU and Shayne cut their umbilical cords before that happened, he managed to take a photo of one twin, but not the other, due to them being whisked away. Shayne then had a one hour time limit in the hospital before he was told he had to leave, and so Shayne spent that time making sure the boys were settled in NICU, and then coming back to spend the rest of the time with me as I had just had a major operation, so he sat with me in recovery.
12. Once Shayne left, I was taken in the bed to NICU to briefly see the boys and then taken to a postnatal side ward room.
13. I remember thinking that the side room was great because I wasn't on a ward with people who had their babies with them which I would have found very distressing, and I was able to be completely on my own. But of course, the downside to being completely on your own is that no one else is there, and you are alone. I found it particularly ridiculous that Shayne wasn't allowed to be with me alone in a side room on the ward given that he had been allowed to be with me waiting for the

birth and during the birth. I don't see how Shayne could have been a risk to anyone else if he had been with me in a room on our own.

14. The nurses were helpful in providing some care for me whilst I was alone in the room, but I felt silly asking them to help me do things like help me plug a phone charger in and basic things, which really, nurses shouldn't have to do, but of course I couldn't do myself because I was recovering from a major operation. If Shayne had been with me, he would have been able to attend to these basic needs for me.
15. I found it incredibly difficult that my family of five were now torn apart. Shayne was in one place, our daughter was staying with my mum and dad for a week for childcare so that Shayne could come to me in hospital, my two boys were in incubators separated from me and next to each other, but not in the same incubator, and I was alone in a room. I didn't really get any updates on the boys in those first couple of days and there wasn't very good communication between the two departments, the one dealing with me and the one dealing with the boys.
16. Due to this I just tried to get to the stage as quickly as possible where I could be discharged from the hospital because I didn't want to be a patient in the hospital for any longer than necessary, in a room on my own, unable to see my husband, the boys, or my daughter properly. I remember asking the nurse: "what is the minimum time that I need to be here?" and I'm sure she said at least 12 hours after my catheter came out.
17. In the end I was discharged after 27 hours following my operation because I was just so unhappy being on my own on the hospital ward.
18. We then came into contact with rigid Covid rules of NICU. Part of these rules were that two parents could not be allowed on the unit at the same time. This made sense for people who had one baby, but for us, who had had two babies, it made no sense at all. If there had been two babies born to different parents then one parent would have been able to be with each baby, but because we had had twins, our babies weren't allowed to have one parent per baby. Practically this had a number of knock-on effects.

19. Firstly, I was still recovering from major abdominal surgery. As I previously said we lived 52 miles away from the hospital and it was a 45 minute trip to the hospital. My daughter was 5 years old and by this time we were in lockdown, therefore she was not at school. Before lockdown she had been very excited about meeting her new brothers, and now she was being told that she wasn't allowed to see them, and that mummy and daddy would be going to hospital every day to see them and therefore she wouldn't be with mummy and daddy for half of each day, and she wouldn't be going to school. This was all obviously highly confusing and distressing for my daughter. We would therefore have to have breakfast with my daughter, drop her off with my parents for around 10am drive to the hospital, and then spend time at the hospital and then drive home for around 3/4pm for my daughter. This caused my daughter a huge amount of anxiety separation and distress.
20. We were also distressed because we couldn't be on the NICU unit at the same time. We had to wait in a waiting room whilst one of us was in there, and then we would swap around with the other person waiting in the waiting room whilst the other parent went into the unit. We found this to be completely nonsensical. We couldn't understand why it was any safer from an infection perspective for one of us to be sitting in a waiting room with lots of other people, as opposed to two of us being in the NICU unit, one looking after each baby. We raised this a number of times, but nobody would listen and relent on this issue. Again, there were two babies and we couldn't see why the rules couldn't be one parent per baby on the NICU ward for us, but were for everyone else as they only had 1 baby.
21. As I wanted to make sure that everything was completely fair between us, of the 4 hours we had with the babies each day, I would be in the unit for 2 hours and then I would go to the waiting room and Shayne would then go into the unit for 2 hours whilst I waited in the waiting room. We found it barmy and bureaucratic but obviously we had to follow the rules. I remember at this stage the nurses wore masks, but patients and parents were not asked to wear masks.
22. This started to really affect our daughter, so after a couple of weeks on the 26th April, we decided to have a day at home, but that was horrific because we weren't seeing the boys or getting an update. We then tried to change how we did the

visiting time a bit so we could spend a little bit more time with our daughter rather than splitting the time with her.

23. One particular thing which sticks in my memory was that I wanted to express milk for my boys. Everybody tells you that breast is best, and I really wanted to do what I could for them. This was ok for the first day or two but then once I was discharged from hospital and was having to travel in a lot, juggle the waiting room, NICU, my daughter, recovering from the operation and the travel, expressing became very difficult. It was very difficult to use the limited 2 hour time limit I had on the NICU ward to express milk because I wanted to be spending time with the boys, picking them up and attending to their needs, I didn't want to be sat expressing milk which can take a considerable amount of time. I therefore asked for a side room to be able to express milk whilst Shayne was on the unit rather than waiting in the waiting room as it was obviously not appropriate to express milk in a public place. To my absolute horror, when I asked for this, the nurse said that there was not a side room that I could use but suggested that I use the toilet to express milk. I remember thinking to myself: "does she realise how many germs there are in a toilet and that I don't want to put those germs into my premature and sick babies?", I obviously was not prepared to sit in a toilet and express milk and found it a ludicrous suggestion, and I quite frankly couldn't believe the nurse had made the suggestion.

24. I did my best to try and express the milk on the car journeys to and from the hospital, but practically that was impossible, as it was just impossible to keep the milk from spilling and just wasn't practical at all. This meant that I only expressed milk for 4 or 5 days because I just couldn't keep up as I was stressed, and had nowhere to express for at least 6 hours during the day, and I was so exhausted from it all, that to get a proper routine (which I was able to get with our daughter 9 years ago), was impossible too, which just added an extra layer of stress to the whole situation.

25. During the first week of the babies' birth, we found out that they had MRSA. The babies were swabbed at birth which we weren't told about. I remember sitting in the NICU unit in a chair holding one of the twins, the one which had low flow

oxygen, so he was attached to the wall. It is quite tricky to handle a small, poorly baby, who is attached to a wall by oxygen tubes. Two ladies came in wearing black scrubs and almost casually mentioned to me that the twins have had MRSA swabs, and that the provisional result was positive, but they needed to await the final result, which wouldn't be ready until the following day. They then casually walked out without giving me any further information.

26. I can remember just sitting there in absolute shock thinking that my 2 tiny twin baby boys had MRSA, a dangerous superbug that all we knew about it was that MRSA could kill you. I just felt awful. I just started having a huge panic. The nurse then came back from her break and asked what was wrong and I explained. I was in a panic, I didn't know if I could leave the room because I was now touching a baby with MRSA, I didn't know if I could hold the boys because would that cause them any more problems and were we giving them germs. I was in an absolute panic about what to do. I put my baby back into the incubator with the nurse's help as I was getting in such a state and walked out of the unit back to Shayne in the waiting room. As soon as Shayne saw my face, he knew something was wrong and I ended up in floods of tears again and couldn't get my words out to explain to Shayne what had happened. However of course I was trying to explain to him but before I could explain all Shayne saw was me come back from the ward in tears and for all Shayne knew something really bad could have happened, one of the babies could have died or became seriously ill. Once I explained to him about the MRSA Shayne could see how absolutely devastated I was, and he was extremely angry because I shouldn't have been told something like that in the way I was, and Shayne went back onto the unit to find out what was going on whilst I stayed in the waiting room.

27. Eventually we were given some proper information about the MRSA, I think this was the following day. One of the doctors who was about to go off duty (she was really lovely), saw we were upset and asked why, she then sat on a chair near us and explained to us that there were two types of MRSA - one was internal which could be fatal and the second one colonises on the skin and using special soap treatment which we were told would clear it up. She said that given our boys were still growing, not deteriorating and gaining weight then hopefully it was highly likely

that it was the second type of MRSA that they had which was colonising on the skin and thankfully that did turn out to be the case.

28. We were then asked to test and do swabs for MRSA but we refused to do that alone and went down to the shower room to do that together as by that time I was an absolute state. Shayne broke the rules (which the nurses didn't actually try to stop, perhaps given the situation we were in at that moment) once to come onto the ward during that time because I was so scared to hold the babies, I was in a mess and he helped me hold one of the babies to support me and show me it was ok, he then left and went back to the waiting room. He decided that it was better to prioritise my mental health at that stage because I was panicking so much that if I held the babies I would harm them with germs.
29. Due to the MRSA we were robbed of the chance of giving the babies their first bath because we were worried about using the treatment soap and getting it wrong, so they had to be bathed by the nursing team.
30. Once they were given the formal MRSA diagnosis, the boys had to be moved into a room on their own to be completely isolated from the other babies. At this point we thought that maybe they would allow Shayne and I to be in the same room at the same time as the boys. After all, now the only people who were in that room were our 2 twin boys and one of us, therefore it seemed to us to make absolutely no sense that one of us had to wait in the waiting room with other people, increasing the risk of infection, rather than both of us being in a room with just the two of our boys.
31. We kept trying to tell the nursing staff that we were living together, driving in a car to the hospital together, so why couldn't we go into the room together. However, we were just told over and over again that the rules were the rules that footfall had to be reduced and we weren't allowed to go into the room together. There seemed to be no option for the matron to go higher to ask and try to help about our situation. By this time we felt it was all completely mad and illogical and the system simply had no way of adapting for people like us in the situation that we were in, because of the way they were doing it, it meant that we were having to spend more time away from our daughter as if we had been able to go into the room together, we

could have maybe reduced the length of time which we were in the hospital. The rules seemed to have been, and felt like they were written for a couple having their first baby rather than a couple like us with a young child at home and 2 premature twin boys.

32. All in all, the boys were in hospital for 31 days.

33. Other parents couldn't understand why the hospital was being so inflexible for us as we had two babies, the other parents also said that they had no issue at all with us both being in the unit because the rules were one parent per baby. There were situations where one of us would be in the room calming one of the twins, and the other twin would start crying and we wouldn't know which baby to prioritise. Had we been allowed to be in the room together, then we would have been able to settle them both at the same time, which would have helped ours and the twins' stress levels.

34. My daughter was also becoming increasingly upset that she wasn't allowed to visit her baby brothers. She was not at school because of the lockdown, so again the only people she was coming into contact with was ourselves at home and my parents for childcare while we were at the hospital, and who were obviously complying with the lockdown rules. We therefore couldn't understand why she couldn't be allowed to visit with one of us all be it briefly to see her baby brothers.

35. I remember that one lady, who I think was a hospital counsellor, once came into the room with me when the babies were in the room in isolation, sat with me and asked if I needed any support, at that time I was simply on autopilot trying to get through each day, so I think I said that I was ok and she gave me a card. I still don't understand why a counsellor was allowed to be in the same room with me and my 2 boys but my husband Shayne wasn't. We didn't need counselling at that stage, what we needed was for the hospital to understand that we are a family, and these were our children. We didn't feel we were going to see our children because of the way everything was making us feel, we felt like we were going to see patients. We didn't feel like a mother and father to those children in the way that we should have done.

36. I remember being on constant clock watch on the unit because I wanted to make sure Shayne got equal time with the boys, he also needed to have time with the babies, he has told me that he also felt the same and also felt on constant clock watch too.
37. The communications which we had from the hospital were quite patchy. Some members of staff were much better than others. Nurses kept increasing oxygen levels overnight (without letting his body a chance to sort his levels out) and also without explanation. We also were giving the boys a bottle working hard to get them ready for coming home knowing that they had to be fine with a bottle for a couple of days at least, then one nurse gave them milk via NG tube overnight for no reason and then throwing that back by a couple of days.
38. After the boys came home and that ordeal was behind us, we sat and started to speak to each other. We really were completely overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety, upset, anger, frustration, worry, annoyance and depression. Our daughter had suffered from separation anxiety (which we feel she still does 4 years on) and both I and Shayne were extremely distressed. We were very disconnected from friends and family and as lockdown then came to an end, we were extremely anxious about seeing anyone due to the boys being unwell at birth and one of the twins actually had chronic lung disease. Again, this is another example of bad communication by the hospital because we only found out he had chronic lung disease by reading his discharge notes, it wasn't actually communicated to us before he was discharged. This made me even more worried.
39. When everything started opening up, we felt judged by friends and certain family members because we didn't want to go out and meet up with everybody, we just wanted to protect our vulnerable boys. My dad was also at high risk and I didn't know if I was high risk because of my medical conditions so we didn't want to risk things. We just wanted to keep ourselves safe and our family safe. We therefore were very careful for a couple of years after the boys were born to make sure that their health was protected above all else. This left us feeling judged by friends and family on the decisions we made to keep our family safe.

40. I still have immense feelings of grief for what should have been in terms of a birth, it could have been very different, especially if Shayne had been allowed to experience more of it with me and if we were allowed to be together on the unit. I feel extremely jealous and sad when I look at others having healthy births and having hospital visits, having a normal time after birth, and although, of course, I am extremely happy for those families, I just wish that we could have had that as well, or just what we should have had. There are many triggers that make both Shayne and I upset, angry, guilty and regretful, photos, songs even the smell of the antiseptic soaps and cleaning products in a hospital if we have any hospital appointments now, this can give me a trigger and a flashback to the time in the hospital. It has been an extremely traumatic time for both of us, and we feel extremely angry that our individual needs and the needs of our boys were not taken into account by the NHS or leaders making the rules during this period.

41. If there were to be another pandemic, I firmly believe that the rules should allow a partner to accompany pregnant women to all appointments, and also that if someone has multiple births, then both parents should be allowed to visit the babies at the same time, providing that appropriate infection controls and PPE are in place to protect everyone. Compassion and common sense needs to be put in place as well as more flexibility to see when rules need to be altered in individual circumstances. I wouldn't want any other couple to go through what we have gone through.

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.

Signed:

PD

Dated: 14/06/2024