

48 Treeview Drive
Burleigh Waters
Queensland 4220

10 June 2004

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee

Dear Sir/Madam

It has been brought to my attention that offering compensation to people with medically acquired Hepatitis "C", specifically via a transfusion of blood on blood products may constitute unfair discrimination against people who have acquired the Hepatitis "C" virus by other means, i.e. substance abuse and in particular intravenous drug use and abuse by the sharing of needles.

As a former manager of the management committee of the Hepatitis "C" Council of Queensland and the co-chairman of that committee for one year, I do not believe this to be the case.

During my time on the management committee, I dealt with many people from all walks of life, who had become infected with Hepatitis "C". It became very evident to me that the needs, support, counselling of those with medically acquired Hep "C" were entirely different to those who had acquired the virus by other means.

Injecting drug users by and large were accepting of their fate and still continued in many cases to continue to use drugs with a somewhat couldn't care less attitude. I found this to be quite disturbing and very alarming while those with medically acquired/transfused Hepatitis "C", were absolutely crushed when they learnt of their affliction.

Marriages, seemingly good marriages, were suddenly put under tremendous strain. Mothers and fathers were so devastated they could not bring themselves to tell their children and families of their illness, some faced dismissal from their employment. Some had already been dismissed; many simply could not bring themselves to cope with the knowledge of their infection and became suicidal.

With this in mind I elected in the year 2000 to start a support group here on the Gold Coast for those who had medically acquired Hepatitis "C". I was encouraged but not supported in this endeavor, the reason being it was made known to me was that the subject of compensation would arise and that may not be a path to pursue, also it was pointed out that the support group should be open to all – I had no intention of turning anyway away in any case.

To have the terms of the support group dictated to me was in my opinion an act of discrimination in itself.

I and the group were being discriminated against before we had even started, consequently the group never came to fruition, sadly.

Have you ever been to a dinner, where a “special” place had been set for you? Been refused life assurance? Had personal files marked in RED and underlined HEPATITIS “C”? Had a doctor refer you to his nurse to draw blood for a test?

These and many other similar instances have become the lot of people with transfused Hepatitis “C”.

Many, many of us have suffered in silence over many years for fear of discrimination should our dark secret become public knowledge.

We have become pariahs living in a situation not of our choosing – we are the innocent victims trapped in a world not of our choice.

In closing I have the greatest sympathy and compassion for those who carry this virus, however compensation for medically acquired/transfused sufferers of Hepatitis “C” does not constitute discrimination in any shape or form in any circumstances.

For reasons of privacy I have not named the persons pertinent to my story.

I can assure you however they are the absolute truth.

Yours sincerely

COLIN LAVER