

Witness Name: Dr Stephen Cockroft

Statement No.:

Exhibits:

Dated:

DAWN STURGESS INQUIRY

Witness Statement of Dr Stephen Cockroft

I, Dr Stephen Cockroft, will say as follows:

1. I can confirm that statement reference INQ004608 is the only statement that I have made regarding any aspect of the Salisbury or subsequent Amesbury poisonings. That statement was taken on 19 March 2018 by officers from counterterrorism command. The statement is a little confusing to read so I felt it may be useful if I try to explain why it was required and summarise it.
2. An untoward event took place on Thursday 8 March 2018. A colleague (Dr James Haslam) had ordered all sedation to be discontinued temporarily to Yulia Skripal. This is quite a common practice on Intensive Care Units (ICU) and we refer to it as a "sedation hold" and would normally be planned and discussed with the team. Unfortunately, having ordered the sedation hold, Dr Haslam left the ICU without advising me. I was present on the ICU treating another patient.
3. As a consequence, Yulia Skripal regained consciousness very quickly and was confused, frightened, trying to get out of bed and was pulling at her various vascular access lines and breathing tube. She was in severe danger of injuring herself. On entering her hospital room, I immediately took hold of her hands and tried to reassure her that she was safe. Simultaneously I asked the two nurses present to restart her sedation, but as these were infusion pumps it was going to take several minutes for sedation to become effective.
4. Whilst these infusions were recommenced, I tried to reassure Yulia that she was safe, as was her father. I had absolutely no idea what they had both experienced on that fateful Sunday 4 March 2018 and had no idea if they had been attacked or would have had any knowledge or insight into the events that had led to their hospital admission. During those few minutes I asked Yulia if she had any recollection of her and her father being assaulted in some way. Fortunately, after some five minutes, she was safely sedated and support of her breathing could be re-established.
5. I tried to feedback my concerns to Dr Haslam, but he was of the opinion that nothing untoward had occurred, but when these events were reported back to the Medical

Director (Christine Blanshard) she had a very different opinion and I was summoned to a meeting with her on Monday 12 March to discuss my management of the incident. There is no formal record of that meeting, however I was suspended from working on the ICU with immediate effect until Yulia and Sergei had either been discharged or died. Apparently by having had a conversation with Yulia Skripal I had been unprofessional and should have left such a conversation to the security services. I was warned by Dr Blanshard that I should not discuss any aspect of the poisonings with colleagues or other individuals and advised that any such discussion would be treated as serious misconduct. As a result of having communicated with Yulia Skripal I was interviewed by the police and my statement recorded.

6. The irony is that I was the ICU consultant on duty on Sunday 4th March 2018 and was directly involved with the initial resuscitation of Sergei & Yulia Skripal from the moment they were admitted to Salisbury District Hospital and provided ICU support for the following 24 hours. However, as a result of that meeting (12 March 2018) I was forbidden to discuss any aspect of the presentation, recognition or initial treatment of Yulia or Sergei Skripal. We would normally have monthly ICU morbidity and mortality meetings but any discussion of the poisoning attempt was forbidden. I do feel this was a lost opportunity to discuss with my colleagues what I observed in those first few hours and how I recognised that the Skripals had been poisoned.
7. Subsequently there were three meetings to which I was invited and to participate.
8. The first was a presentation to the Health Protection Agency (HPA), part of the Department of Health at their Porton Down headquarters. I am afraid I can't recall the exact date but I seem to remember it was in late April 2018. The invitation to attend came from the HPA and the meeting was chaired by Dr Bob Winter, National Clinical Director for Critical Care and Emergency Preparedness for NHS England. The delegates were a mixture of NHS England clinicians and managers along with members of the security services. I was initially advised that I should speak about the presentation and recognition of the poisoning episode. Unfortunately, Dr Blanshard intervened and the discussion was steered toward the communication issues that subsequently arose between the A&E and concerned members of the public. No frontline Salisbury NHS staff were present at this meeting other than Dr Blanshard, Dr Haslam (ICU Consultant) and Dr Steve Davies (A&E Consultant).
9. The second meeting took place on Thursday 21 June 2018 in the lecture theatre at Salisbury District Hospital. This was chaired by Dr Blanshard. On this occasion there were some one hundred Salisbury Hospital medical and nursing staff in the audience but I was given no opportunity to discuss my experiences in recognising and treating Novichok poisoning. The medical director prevented me from volunteering any of this information, explaining that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the overall response of the hospital to the poisoning episode.
10. A third and final meeting took place at DSTL Porton Down on Thursday 12 July. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. This was the only occasion on which I was given an opportunity to give a full presentation. I was able to describe in detail my clinical observations at the moment that the Yulia and Sergei Skripal arrived in the emergency department and then their subsequent management on the ICU. Following this, I was given an opportunity to answer any questions relatively uninterrupted.

11. I can confirm that I had no involvement in the treatment of Dawn Sturgess and only very limited last-minute involvement with Charlie Rowley as part of his post hospital discharge monitoring. I took and analysed a blood sample for cholinesterase activity.
12. I resigned from my role as Intensive Care Anaesthetics Consultant in early January 2019 and my last working day was 25 April 2019. I then took up full time employment as a Consultant Anaesthetist at New Hall Hospital (part of Ramsay Healthcare).

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court 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 in its truth.

Signed: _____

Personal Data

Dated: 18 July 2024