

*For the attention of Mr. John Leakey*

Statement by Ann Henderson (Aunt of Conor Mitchell through marriage to Jonathan Mitchell) regarding treatment received by Conor Mitchell at Craigavon Hospital on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

29<sup>th</sup> March 2004

I arrived at Craigavon Hospital around 9am on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> of May, along with my husband Jonathan Mitchell. (This was the earliest possible moment we could be there. I remained with Joanna, Conor's mother and Judy, Conor's grandmother, throughout the period Conor was in hospital.)

On arrival at Craigavon Hospital Joanna immediately told us of Conor's present condition and that she had been told the night before she might soon have to be making decisions regarding Conor's life support.

It was mid Friday afternoon, in the midst of such an utterly terrible situation that I was witness to the further distress caused by an incident, incredible in nature. A Dr. McAllister called the immediate family, Joanna, Judy and Jonathan, into the parents' room. No one had requested or expected further discussions with a doctor at this stage. Just a few minutes later Jonathan returned to the ICU waiting room where the rest of us waited. He was extremely distressed as a direct result of Dr. McAllister's conduct during their meeting. Joanna and Judy also returned some minutes later also further distressed as a result of this meeting. As detailed in Joanna's statement Dr McAllister had acted with incredible arrogance and hostility towards the Mitchell family. I witnessed the effect and damage done in further distressing a family at a time of such utter torment. At time when they most needed support from medical staff they were inexplicably exposed to this misconduct.

A couple of hours later again that Friday afternoon I was sitting with Joanna in the canteen trying to convince her of the

29/03/2004 16:16

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PAGE 03

importance of managing to eat something, as she had already collapsed several times throughout the day due to distress. A nurse approached us saying that Dr McAllister wanted to speak with Joanna on her own. We all were understandably filled with fear that Conor had deteriorated further and waited anxiously for Joanna to return. We could not believe it when Joanna returned absolutely elated as Dr McAllister had told her that Conor was showing unexpected signs of recovery and that he should continue to improve. He also informed Joanna that he had made arrangements for Conor to be transferred to the Royal Hospital for Sick Children. I remember being afraid at first to believe that such good news could really be true as Conor's outlook had suddenly taken a complete turn around, from one of little or no hope to one of an impending miraculous recovery. But as Joanna reiterated what Dr McAllister had said I became wholly convinced that this was indeed a turning point for Conor - nothing short of the miracle I had been praying for.

I remember so clearly the feeling of euphoria the whole family was experiencing. Everything had changed from a situation of absolute dread and fear for Conor's future. Suddenly there not only was some fragile inkling of hope but an unexpected hope that could be based solidly upon Dr McAllister's findings. We were in fact so convinced and confident of Conor's change of situation that we allowed Joanna to go on ahead in the ambulance with Conor to the Royal and did not follow along in a car behind. We returned instead to the family home to eat and for Judy to shower. We would not have remotely considered leaving either Conor or Joanna at this point had we not been utterly convinced by Dr McAllister's good news.

As soon as I saw Joanna's face on meeting at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children I knew that something was drastically wrong. We were immediately informed by Dr Gary and Dr Bothwell that Conor's outlook was very grave and that they regretfully had no reason at this point to believe otherwise. We were told that Conor may have a 1 percent chance of any recovery and for

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29/03/2004 16:16

PAGE 04

that reason they would work through a period of time to ensure he was given this possible opportunity in full.

Through the period of this one day, Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, Conor's condition according to staff at Craigavon hospital went from one of little or no hope, to one where suddenly, against all odds, he was making such positive responses that a great degree of recovery could be hoped for. By early evening however the diagnosis at the Royal Victoria Hospital had left no doubt as to the falseness of this hope.

At the Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children the staff did everything humanly possible for Conor. At the Royal Conor was treated with dignity and I am wholly convinced that while there he received all the medical attention he needed. The family in turn was also treated at the Royal in a way which was not only professional but sympathetic, often beyond the call of duty.

I also want it noted that I am familiar with all the detailed statements made by Joanna and the Mitchell family. I want to confirm that I have heard them reiterate these same facts, to the same level of detail before any knowledge of having to compound them together within formal statements. The level of detail within these statements is simply indicative of the great attention they paid to Conor throughout his entire life. The bulk of my statement was first written down on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003 but I found myself unable to complete it until now.

I feel it also necessary to emphasis that the Mitchell family, Joanna and Judy in particular, have been plunged unnecessarily into an arena of further unbearable distress due to the fact that some of the staff from Craigavon hospital seem prepared lie in their statements.

I ask myself continuously - if someone had listened to Joanna or Judy during those long hours that Thursday at Craigavon would Conor not be alive today ? Is not considered crucial that the

29/03/2004 16:16 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

PAGE 05

medical profession should take into account information provided by family members, especially if the patient, as in Conor's case, is unable to speak for themselves? I also feel that the unforgivable arrogance exhibited by some of the members of staff at Craigavon attributed directly towards Conor's death.

It is unforgivable that Conor should have suffered so at Craigavon Hospital at the hands of the medical profession within the UK National Health System in 2003, that no one took action to relieve Conor's obvious suffering during the long period through which he endured the series of seizures, that Conor was treated in such a manner without dignity and that the family during their time at Craigavon hospital were put under unnecessary further distress due to the conduct and attitudes displayed by some of the medical staff.

Joanna and Judy and Conor possessed a relationship which was absolutely extraordinary in their demonstration of love, trust and respect towards one another. They together possessed an irrefutable determination. Conor himself possessed such strength of character and sense of humour that he deeply affected those who had the good fortune to cross his path.

Conor paid the ultimate price for the mistakes made on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2003 and his family continue to pay an unbearable price.

*Ann Handerson 29<sup>th</sup> March 2004*