

**Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry
Witness Statement**

Statement of REYNOLDS/Marian – HSC0052

Statement taken at 1400 hours on Wednesday 13 September 2023 at the
offices of Thompson’s Solicitors, Edinburgh

Introduction

1. My name is Marian Reynolds, and my date of birth is [PD]. My details are known to The Inquiry. I am employed as a sheltered housing manager for a private housing association, I have had previous jobs in the NHS and private health sector as a trained nurse.

2. I have met today with witness statement takers from the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry team, and I am happy to provide a statement about my experiences of the pandemic. I have provided them with access to my background meeting notes with Thompson’s Solicitors and am happy that they be included to assist in forming my statement. I am willing to provide a statement, have my information within reports and, for my statement to be published. I have completed the consent form provided and I am content that the interview is recorded. I would be willing to provide evidence at an oral hearing.

People to be Spoken of ([NR])

3. I wish to give a statement to The Inquiry about my aunty and my mum. My aunty’s name is [NR], and she is 95. My mum’s name is [NR], and she was 89 years of age when she died. My aunty was in the Bo’ness Hospital which comes under NHS Forth Valley. My mum was being cared for at home before being moved into the Bo’ness Hospital.

The Pandemic

4. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, I did not think it would last. They initially said that lockdown would last for 4 to 6 weeks as a short sharp shock, so I told myself, to my shame, this was like a wee holiday from responsibilities, I was scared for our health yes, but honestly, I had time on my hands to cook decent meals, clean my windows etc.

5. My husband was at home he had retired. My son worked in Tesco, so his job was safe, but his wife was in fashion retail so she was at home and could look after my granddaughter.

6. My daughter was still working in a care home, being needed helped her mental health as she lived alone. I also still had to work, though only necessary tasks and twice per day deep cleaning. So, some of our wages were safe.
7. I stayed working. At first everyone was told to stay at home. I was told to collect all my residents phone numbers and be on the end of a phone if they needed me. I would phone all my residents every morning and my daily tasks continued. I had 23 flats within the property I was managing most were single occupancy.

Aunty - NR

8. I was my aunty's main carer prior to June 2019. My aunty, prior to going to the Bo'ness Hospital, was admitted to the Forth Valley Royal Hospital in June 2019 after being designated as an "adult without capacity". She then moved to the Falkirk Community Hospital and from there to the Bo'ness Hospital in November/December 2019.
9. My aunty was an adult without capacity which meant that, although she could make decisions for herself, these were very often seen as unsafe judgements.
10. My aunty was not in a care home as there was no power of attorney (POA) in place, and they could not legally move her. I was in the process of gaining guardianship for my aunty; my mum was next of kin.

Pre-pandemic

11. Prior to the pandemic I could visit Aunty pretty much at any time apart from mealtimes.
12. Early 2020 I was watching like most of the country the news and seeing this horrible disease creep ever nearer.
13. I visited aunty in Bo'ness Hospital daily, my mother was unable to visit her, and my sister visited approximately weekly. She had a separate room to herself and was free to roam around.
14. Around 20 March that year, I visited my aunt and noticed the nurse's barrier nursing the lady in the room next to and very close to my aunty. The ward was, in all other ways, behaving normally, but this lady's visitors were asked to wear masks and aprons. I spoke to one of the nurses at the time, and asked if they were about to close to visitors, she just shrugged. I collected aunty's washing.

15. The next day I went to visit the hospital and there was a sign on the door saying 'closed to visitors. I spoke to a nurse through the glass door and was told I could not even drop off washing. I received no phone calls from the hospital, nothing. No information as to what was happening. It was kind of obvious that it was Covid as I was following the news.
16. The country locked down on 23 March 2020. I could not see my mum, my son or his wife, my granddaughter and daughter. Nor could I see my aunt.
17. My mum had been in and out of hospital over the years, but she had a care package in place via the social services and she had carers going in and out of her home; they would see to her in the mornings and evenings making sure she took her medication. Mum came under the Falkirk social services.

Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR)

18. At the end of March 2020, I got call from Bo'ness hospital asking if I would agree to a DNACPR form for my aunty. They did not have a form on her records.
19. Now at this stage my mum was her next of kin and guardianship was not yet granted to me. Being a nurse once I am aware of what this means, and I struggled to tell them that, although I knew with certainty that aunty would not wish invasive operations, cardiac resuscitation, or anything of this nature, she did believe in antibiotics, injections, pain relief.
20. I wanted to be firm that do not resuscitate, did not mean do not do anything. Should aunty become ill, we would wish her to have pain relief, oxygen, and personal care, in effect anything to ease and comfort her.
21. These comments were met with frustration from the nurse who called, saying that was not what she asked, I did point out that this would have been aunty's wishes, and I did not have POA or guardianship, so stating this was all the power I had at that time. My guardianship for my aunty came through in July 2020.
22. I thought it was wrong these things require a signature. I do not know whether they put a DNACPR sticker on her file or not.
23. I received another call that day from a social worker, who was not aunty's named social worker, telling me there was a bed in a nursing home for aunty in Airth, aunty was bed blocking and due to the pandemic, they were freeing up hospital space. I protested. Aunty never wanted to leave Bo'ness, she would be very distressed, it was too far away for her.

24. I begged that I be allowed to nurse aunty at home, I had room downstairs, downstairs toilet facilities, I was told she, at present was in their care, I had no say as I did not have POA or Guardianship. I pleaded that Airth was geographically too far, and the reply was 'That's not an issue, you can't visit anyway'. I found this strange, I had just been asked if I would agree to a DNR, yet I had no say in where aunty would live.
25. My mother and aunty had, as young children, been taken from their father and put in a children's home when their mother was unable to care for them. They had experienced neglect and cruelty. It had been terrible for them both. They were only allowed back home after aunty was old enough to care for her younger sister and it scarred them for life.
26. Aunty looked out for mum all her life since this and had a fear of institutions and the power they wield. This move would be torture for aunty, and the thought would torment my mother and the rest of the family, but I was powerless.
27. It is important to note here that during this time, there were no forms or legal documents requiring signatures, no paper trail, just phone calls.
28. My brothers and my sister at this time were used to routine updates on aunty from me by text, and we contacted my mum by phone, and shared our thoughts or concerns in that respect.

Hospital visits.

29. Aunty had a ground floor room in the hospital. Her 92nd birthday was on PD 2020. I checked she was still in hospital and planned a window visit. As an essential worker I could travel, and if stopped could claim I was on my way to work, and show proof of my employment, this was naughty, but I was desperate to see her, and see for myself how she was.
30. Aunty is deaf, we have for years (since her eyesight deteriorated and she could no longer lip read) communicated on a white board with marker pens, or by note pad and pen. I organised a card and flower delivery, and I wrote on a dozen or so boards, messages about how the family were, how mum was, how she was loved and missed. When I got to hospital, her flowers were outside, with other flowers I'm guessing sent by other families to their loved ones, and aunty was not in her room, someone else was.
31. I managed to call nurses on the phone and was told she had been moved upstairs and was told to go around the side and I would see her. I stood waiting, and a very ill looking aunty was brought to an upstairs window,

she couldn't see me, but I could hear her saying 'what are you doing, leave me alone'. I shouted for them to stop, and that I was going.

32. I felt physically sick at what I had done to her. I had gone with such high hopes of seeing her on her birthday, and I had initiated this stressful confusing time for her. The only time I tried to bend the rules for my own advantage, and it backfired horribly.
33. One of the nurses who I knew told me sometime later that they had felt terrible watching me sob in my car for so long before I could drive home.
34. I got a call the following night saying aunty was ill, so I could not go down, but just letting me know she had had a day in bed. Two days later I was told she would not be going to Airth as she had covid. They said she was fine for the moment.
35. Incidentally that same nurse who watched me cry in the car park, also told me that the night I got the call to say aunty was ill, they did not think she would make it through the night then. I told her I never knew; I was not told.
36. Moving into May there was some uplift of restrictions, we were able to go outdoors, could have garden visits with family, drop shopping off for mum, and I could go for walks with my exhausted daughter. She was working as kitchen staff in a care home and so many staff and residents were sick; she was doing double shifts.
37. They had no PPE for kitchen staff, it was so scarce, it was the same at my work. I was making her kitchen staff fabric masks and had done same for myself and family.
38. The realisation that what I had wished for in release of responsibilities was delivered by Covid but was not what I imagined.
39. I was constantly worrying and feeling inadequate, totally helpless, but being expected to have all the answers for my family.
40. My younger brother who lives in PD called me constantly, and he was frustrated, unable to travel, and arguing that I had not done enough. I understood his frustration, but it became just another layer of stress. I seemed at this time to be constantly defending myself and explaining the rules. I was saying "*no you can't go into mum, my other brother was going in, and carers, yes, I do some shopping, yes, I check up on her, no I can't see aunty, the GP will not come out to mum*".

41. In June 2020 I could at least visit aunty booking daily appointments, visiting in mask and apron, I was watched whilst washing hands etc. I was the named visitor; she was still in Boness hospital.

Aunty's care post guardianship

42. During Aunty's last days in hospital, she said to me that I had to get her out of there. I witnessed three nurses conducting a Covid test by holding each of her hands and the third one was putting the test up her nose. Aunty was very agitated and could have done the test herself.
43. In August 2020 having been granted guardianship, I got aunty a place in Bo'ness care home. I picked it because I knew it, but I did not visit it before she went there. I was not allowed to because of Covid restrictions. I could not be shown her room. I was able to drop off her television and her ornaments and I was told that these would be quarantined for 14 days. I met the care home manager in the car park to hand over the television and the ornaments.
44. Aunty had 14 days isolation and no visitors were allowed when she first went there. I thought here we go again; I had had better access in hospital, and that access was appalling.
45. The care home started garden visits, I was the only one in the family allowed, but the rest of the country were 'eating out to help out'. It was awful. Aunty does not like the cold, but we sat in the garden unable to touch in cold autumn afternoons once a week, two yards from a nurse who sat in the middle and aunty another two yards away, trying to communicate with a white board to a deaf, near blind 92-year-old shivering, no privacy. But at least I saw her, this was the best I could do, aunty could not see to watch me on zoom.
46. I wrote letters nearly every day, posting them on the way to work, just short notes, or a card, trying to claw back some contact. Pre-pandemic, bar holidays when my daughter took over for me, I had daily contact with her.
47. Eventually other members of family were allowed to visit via appointments. My sister could only visit on a Sunday, which had been my slot, and the only available slot was Tuesday morning, so I had to get special permission from my work to be able to go there at 11am on a Tuesday.
48. It seemed that come October, when 30-minute time slots were beginning to relax, (in some care homes, guidance always gave care homes the ability to tweak the recommendations with a foot note that says 'where

possible') storm clouds were gathering. Covid was not going away and there was outbreak in the care home - no visiting.

49. Aunty was in a downstairs room so I said okay I will do a window visit. This was not allowed. I asked cheekily, "so it can penetrate glass now can it", I was still not allowed. At that time media were reporting on no trick or treat, it's almost laughable.
50. The one window visit I did have, I took my daughter and granddaughter, and was told only one person allowed at the window. What difference does it make whether one or thirty-one are on the other side of glass, can't touch our loved one, no danger.
51. It was getting bit out of control the way relatives and residents were being treated. I did challenge the stupidity of the rules, but there is always the fear, that this will have some detrimental effect on the attitude towards aunty. I did not want her tagged as a woman with a difficult niece.
52. There were more outbreaks within the home, each one isolating aunty from us. In December 2020, they started rolling out the Pfizer vaccine, but we were at same time heading for another lockdown.
53. I cannot tell you how miserable I was not being able to see aunty on Christmas day, I had seen her every Christmas bar three in my life, and I had to drop off her gifts the week before, quarantining Christmas cheer.

Mum - NR,

54. Mum had very confusing symptoms, some days she was unable to get out of bed for back pain, some days fine, some days engaging in conversation, some days not communicating. The GP prescribed pain killers and medication for constipation. My brother and I moved her bed downstairs. Home care helped with medication; my older brother stayed most mornings with her. I visited after work, and did the housework and sponge baths, and showered her if she was able.
55. In July 2020 Scotland was announcing seven days of no covid deaths. I got a call at work from the carers, mum was ill, they were concerned.
56. I left work and immediately called the GP. Although they were doing very few home visits they would attend. I called my brothers and sister; my older brother joined me.
57. The GP attended, and asked if my brother and I could manage. Mum was not responding, staring into the distance, we knew this was more than just back ache.

58. Mum went into Forth Valley Royal for tests, my older sister was her named visitor and had to book an appointment and tolerate a half hour visit only, but at least she saw her and could relay to us how she was.
59. I got a call from her consultant on her third hospital day, mum had pancreatic cancer and it had spread, and we could not see her. Mum had been told, (the thought of mum being told her diagnosis without one of her children present haunts me still). I was told that she did not have long, maybe a few weeks. My sister was the named visited at this time. We were told that there could only be one named visitor by appointment. I did not make any special visitation requests as I did not know that this would be a possibility.
60. I asked if we could have her home, for end-of-life care, I was told no, this would not be possible, I explained I was a trained nurse, but no was the reply. The consultant said that she would need round the clock care, I can do it I begged. "No, you cannot" was the reply, short and firm. They thought I could not provide the round the clock care that she needed. I was so angry. She had been in and out of hospital, for two years and they had missed this, but she was over 75, and as a sheltered housing manager who had watched similar incidents for 20 years with her residents, no one will convince me that over 75's get the same attention and medical investigations.
61. I know I was rude; I sort of snapped at that point, saying how dare they say I cannot look after her, they don't know what I can do. Stupid I guess, but by going off like this I did manage to persuade the doctor to move her to Bo'ness Hospital. She would at least be in same hospital as her sister.

Mum in Bo'ness Hospital

62. Mum moved hospitals 2 days later, I was named visitor for aunty so could not visit mum. So, my older brother and I waited outside of the hospital for mum's ambulance to arrive, so I could catch a glimpse (briefly as she was trolleyed in) of my mum. My brother was going to be the named visitor this time.

63.

Irrelevant

64. I saw my mum briefly and made visiting appointments with my brother for the same time next day. I would see aunty, he would see mum, and we would meet and exchange news.
65. My mum was kept separate from my aunty, but I am aware that they saw each other.
66. Aunty, who was in the same ward as her beloved sister, was kept away from her. I did find out later that she had sneaked in, night staff had found her standing by mums' bed one night.

67. **Irrelevant**

Bereavement

68. On 20 July the family were told that due to mum's health we could all visit. My younger brother was contacted, and I went in that afternoon. My sister took the evening shift, I snatched some sleep and went in again at 2am. My daughter sat with her for few hours so I could get changed and check on people at work. I returned at 9am, and mercifully my brother and his wife and daughter managed to visit at around midday.
69. We were saying goodbye, we will never know if she knew we were there, it was too late really for all the things family should do and say at that time. Mum died less than an hour after my brother and his family had got there. On hearing the news, I went to the hospital to see her, they had already packed up her stuff and it was by the door waiting for collection. I was allowed a few minutes to give her one last kiss.
70. That same day, Falkirk Sheriff Court rubber stamped my guardianship of my aunty. Odd thing to think about or say but I became an orphan, adopted an aunt, and my **Irrelevant** and my mother lay in same undertakers' parlour on 21 July 2020.
71. Mum's funeral was graveside, 20 people only and we all had to go our separate ways.
72. I suppose I went to work still, I ate, I shopped, I spoke to family, but I cannot remember anything about the end of July that year.

Care Homes Relatives Scotland (CHRS)

73. On 16 September 2020 Care Homes Relatives Scotland (CHRS) staged a protest outside of the Scottish Parliament. Our loved ones were being treated differently from anyone else and I am sure it was because of high

numbers of deaths in care homes early on in the pandemic, but that was not our loved one's fault, it was the fault of the Government's practices early on when they emptied hospital beds into care homes. They tried it with aunty, how many could she have gone on to infect when they wanted to move her to Airth?

74. I had contact with CHRS through Facebook and I gained support from following them.

Impact

75. Every fairy story needs a villain they say, and though a grief-stricken family is no fairy tale, I was becoming aware that my brothers seemed to think I should have managed things better.
76. This was when aunty had gone into the care home (August 2020). I had aunty's house to close, and accounts and a management plan to do, so I stayed out of my siblings' way, thinking it will all calm down. I stayed busy, my granddaughter was back at school, and I fixed some things in my house, which I had not had time to do for at least five years. I stayed busy. Staying busy gave me less time to think. I needed time to get my head straight, to take care of myself, I stepped back from, and did not contact my brothers.
77. That January 2021, my relationship with one brother broke down completely. I got a call, there were so many misunderstandings and false accusations, I was in his mind the villain, and what he had thought I had done, and was doing I cannot imagine where he has got this from.
78. As a family we all were deeply affected by the events of 2020, his anger was directed towards me, and had festered away over the months. I was receiving abusive texts. I know we will never speak again. His hatred, and that's not putting it too strongly, is too deep. I stepped back from contact with my brother.
79. My relationship with my other siblings is careful on my part, I am guarded, distant and fragile. We share history and loss, but do not banter, tease, or laugh so much together, or share what we are doing in life, or at least I don't, I fear misunderstanding, I fear knowing what they really think of me or what we went through, so I don't talk about it.
80. Since February 2021, I have endured various ridiculous measures from masks and no touching, to standing in a cold car park for 30 minutes to get result of a lateral flow test (LFT). Further outbreaks in the home leading to weeks of no contact.

81. It is now February 2023. I have lost so much but have won a reward for sticking to every rule and ridiculous request, my reward is to be able to see aunty whenever I like, to be welcomed into her new home, to hold her hand and laugh with her, to have privacy to tell her my thoughts. Hang on, is this really the reward, or just getting back what I once had, will this be taken away in the future?
82. She does not know who I am, she was early stages of dementia in 2020, we never had chance to help her, to assist her memory with outings to familiar places, and sharing family events. I knew someday she would forget me, and she greets me as a familiar face, but what I was not prepared for was the rapid decline in her knowing who she is, she has become so institutionalised. She has forgotten who she is, her past, her likes and preferences. Her character sometimes shows through, but not often, but I am blessed, I still have her.
83. We were all living on our nerves because of our losses; it was very intense.
84. I am still in touch with my one brother and my sister, but the dynamic of the relationship has changed.

Lessons Learned

85. My place of work is not covered by the care commission, it is very similar to care homes with common rooms and corridors. Where we have flats, they had rooms. People would come in and out and we managed it quickly and effectively. We would think outside the box and developed two metre distancing, a one-way system and passing places. We implemented temporary barriers across doors. My residents were not micro-managed, and things became possible. Why couldn't this be done in care homes.
86. I did not think things were proportionate. We could not individually voice our concerns; CHRS was doing it for us.
87. They were rigid in their easing of restrictions slowly.
88. We should have looked at people's lives and what taking control away from them does.
89. We should make our own choices. We will not take risks with the lives of the ones we love.
90. I do not blame any particular Government; we were all winging it.

Hopes for the Inquiry

91. My wish is that when the inquiry is finished, it must state that the frail and vulnerable should never have their human rights removed again, just because they are vulnerable and have no voice. They did have a voice, they had us, but no one listened, so please listen now.
92. Practices should be structured in how we can maintain their rights and dignity, in the first instance, while we protect.
93. As COVID 19 has proved we must be ready, proactive, not reactive, next time. This is my story, and I have heard worse, but like so many others, I must tell it.

Signed.....

Date.....