

Written evidence submitted by Natalie Parkes-Thompson

Date: March 23rd 2021

To: Julian Knight, MP

Reference 1: Tony Parkes

Reference: 2 Parliamentary Inquiry into concussion in sport – March 2021

Summary: Tony Parkes (ex professional footballer, coach, assistant manager and 6 times caretaker manager). Tony started playing football as a child and was involved in playing the game or training everyday until he retired in 2009. His professional career spanned 40 years. He spent 34 of those years at Blackburn Rovers,. Age: 71 years. Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease in 2019. There is no history of Alzheimer's and Dementia within the family. Heading the ball and collisions on the pitch and in training contributed to his Dementia. Tony's symptoms are similar to those of other footballers known to have died with Dementia.

A Parliamentary Inquiry into concussion in sport has been a long time coming and I really hope it leads to change both in the game and in the way in which support is given to the families of ex-professionals already suffering from Dementia especially in terms of long term support.

Just as background information, Tony was widowed 12 years ago. I am his only daughter and the mother of 2 children under 4. Until September last year I was Dad's full time carer until he moved into residential care after the birth of my second daughter. I have the power of attorney. I have no other family support.

Prior to moving into residential care, Dad lived with myself, my husband and my children. I had been forced to resign my teaching post to care for dad in December 2019 when he could no longer be left alone. Dad was known for being friendly, quick witted and down to earth but all that has now gone and what is left is a scared man with severe language impairment, poor memory recall, agitation, anxiety, irrational behaviour and depression. Dad tries to get out of locked doors, he no longer sleeps and would even follow me into the toilet as he Hayes being alone.

Dad rapidly deteriorated over the course of the first national lockdown, so much so that I found myself having to choose between him and my young children. Even with the daily support of private carers (£650 a month), I knew that I could no longer keep my dad and my children safe under the same roof. Dad moved into his current residential setting in September 2020 at a cost of £900 a week (from April 1st 2021).

The emotional, financial and physical strain has taken it's toll on myself and I stay awake worrying about funding Dad's care in the long term seeing that he is only 71 and the costs will continue to rise. I currently use his pension and savings but what will I do when that runs out? I gave up my wage and pension to care for Dad (I am Currently on Maternity Leave but job opportunities have been reduced during the pandemic). Carers Allowance (£67.25) and direct payments (£1600) stop once the loved one enters residential care.

I see myself as one of the lucky ones in terms of help from the PFA. I approached them in November 2019 after my dad had received his official diagnosis. One of their independent financial advisers helped me to claim Carers Allowance and then the Maternity Allowance. They then funded 11 weeks of residential care at £850 a week whilst I recovered from having my baby. However all that support has now ceased but I feel guilty for asking for further assistance.

Dad absolutely loved what he did and would not have changed his profession even if he was aware of the neurological risks involved in the game. However, he was not made aware of the risks and he gave his entire life to a career which will kill him. I strongly believe that his employers whether that be the FA, the LMA or the PFA need to be made accountable for not addressing this. Failing to make changes or even accepting that Dementia in football is the result of an industrial disease has put generations of footballers at risk. It's too late for my dad but it's not too late for future generations. Change needs to happen now. Families need support.

I have every faith that this inquiry will bring positive change for the future – to help those families already suffering and to protect younger generations. Thank you for taking the time to read my evidence.
Kind regards.

Natalie Parkes-Thompson