

**Supplementary Material 2: Edited transcript of interview with Sandra Corbett conducted by phone on 26 June 2014.**

Approved for publication by SC on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

Speaker key

MJ Martin Johnson

SC Sandra Corbett

MJ: So can you tell me when and how you first became involved with Steptoe and Edwards at Oldham?

SC: When I worked in theatre at Oldham, which would be in 1972

MJ: Okay. And that was in theatre, in the main hospital, was it?

SC: Yes it was.

MJ: And then when did they move to Kershaw's?

SC: They moved up to Kershaw's - it was '71 actually.

MJ: Okay good. And then you were helping in theatre at both sites, were you?

SC: Yes I was.

MJ: Good. So you were in right at the start.

SC: Yes.

MJ: Now can you tell me what it was like working with Patrick?

SC: It was very pleasurable – he was really nice to work for. And it was interesting.

MJ: Interesting. And he was very easy to work for was he?

SC: Very easy to work for. He was nice.

MJ: Okay good. And when did you first meet Bob?

SC: At Dr. Kershaw's in 1974. When he came over and he worked and often slept at Dr. Kershaw's when he was here.

MJ: But did you meet him before you moved to Kershaw's?

SC: Yes, yes.

MJ: And what did you think of Bob?

SC: Well he was very nice actually, very nice. He was, what can I say, lovable.

MJ: Lovable. Yes I think that is a good description, isn't it? He's very full of energy, full of energy.

SC: Yes, oh yes.

MJ: And what did you think of Jean? Did you meet Jean?

SC: She was very nice - it was so unfortunate that she died so young.

MJ: Yes indeed. What was her role? Do you know?

SC: She used to help Bob in the scientific side.

MJ: And she ever do the egg collection?

SC: She was always more or less present when we did the egg collections, yes.

MJ: But she wasn't involved in the theatre then?

SC: No. She wasn't involved in theatre. She was in the scientific side.

MJ: All right. And what about the transfers, the embryo transfers?

SC: No. Bob was there then.

MJ: So Jean wasn't involved in that?

SC: No. She often wasn't there when they happened.

MJ: Okay. What would you think was the working relationship between Bob and Patrick? Was it good?

SC: I think they had a good relationship, a very good relationship.

MJ: Any ups and downs?

SC: Oh they had, they did have their little squabbles, but on the whole they were very good friends.

MJ: Yes - because they were very different personalities, weren't they?

SC: Yes, different personalities.

MJ: Now can we talk a bit about patients? How were they recruited? Do you know?

SC: Well, they came to see Mr. Steptoe, then they used to come up to Dr. Kershaw's and have the procedure done, and at certain times, and it could any time day or night, it just depended on the level of the hormones and what have you. But when they moved down Cambridge, obviously it was a bit different then with patients because they were different nationalities, but they all had something in common. They all wanted babies. And when we set up at first [in Bourn Hall], because then I used to go there sometimes when I was on holiday from the other hospital, like for the treatment rooms instruction, if we got a French lady in, she wrote the instructions down in French. You know, the same with somebody from another country. Write the instructions down [in their language]. And we used to put them up on the wall. That was when I went to help down there – at Bourn Hall. [Dr. Webster would also see patients there, in addition to Mr. Steptoe]

MJ: Right. How long did you help there?

SC: Until—I used to go down there until Miss {Muriel} Harris died.

MJ: Right okay, good. So all of them, all of the patients came via Patrick?

SC: Yes.

MJ: And how did they get to Patrick? Do you know anything about that at all?

SC: I think it was just general referral.

MJ: Yes okay. So who looked after them there initially when they came in? Would they just see Patrick?

SC: Yes. They would have an interview with Patrick. And then when they came to Dr Kershaw's they would be treated by the Kershaw's nursing staff because we was always there.

MJ: Right okay. So who saw them when they came to Kershaw's? Were you just generally looking after them there?

SC: Yes. We were there during the procedures for the egg recovery.

MJ: Okay. And that was your main role in Kershaw's, was it?

SC: Also doing the implants sometimes.

MJ: That was later on presumably doing the implants? [nods] So how do you think the patients coped with the situation there?

SC: I think they coped very well actually. Because it was separate, you know, from the general hospital. And they could walk around the grounds there, same as when you went down to Bourn you could wander around the grounds there or walk to the village. Then I think they have some pressure obviously, but I think they coped very well under the circumstances.

MJ: And this was always a very sensitive area wasn't it morally and so on? I wonder how you found your own moral compass in this field. Did you have any ethical worries about what you were doing?

SC: No.

MJ: No, none at all. You said that very firmly.

SC: Yes.

MJ: So what do you think of people who do have ethical worries?

SC: I know people say if there would have been a way [to have babies], you know, it wasn't to be, but I think it was to be. It was meant to be.

MJ: You mean there was meant to be a cure, a treatment.

SC: Yes. There was meant to be a, you know, a substitute — there was another way found to give childless couples the opportunity.

MJ: Yes. I mean how were the ethical issues handled with patients? Do you know who spoke to them about the ethics of the whole thing?

SC: No not really. I don't think we had a lot of trouble with the patients themselves. I think it was just people, if you mentioned it to people or, you know, some of them were, against it. Some weren't. I think the pressure for being against it was more on Bob and Patrick.

MJ: Did the patients ever talk to you about the success rate or lack of it, and so on?

SC: No. They were quite happy, I think, with the success rate. I think the more it carried on and the more success, people, you know, want more. Obviously at some times it didn't work, people were disappointed, but I don't think they ever gave up.

MJ: But they had been told that this was an experimental treatment. You're sure about that.

SC: Yes.

MJ: So they told you that, did they?

SC: Yes.

MJ: The patients knew that?

SC: Yes, they knew.

MJ: And they had good information about that, did they?

SC: Yes. Everything was explained to them.

MJ: Yes okay, good. Who did that, do you know?

SC: Mr. Steptoe. And regards the scientific side Bob Edwards would speak to them.

MJ: Bob Edwards spoke to them as well. And did Jean speak to them?

SC: Jean used to speak to them now and again, yes.

MJ: Was there an ethics committee, do you know in the hospital at that time?

SC: There wasn't an ethics committee at that time in the hospital. I can't remember because I don't think an ethics committee was set up til it went down to Bourn when it was Lady - can't think of the name. [Note added by SC: Lady Warnock I think]

MJ: Yeah okay. So well, you don't think there was an ethics committee in Oldham. So who would they have talked about ethics with, the hospital board or who?

SC: I think it was people in general. I don't think, you know, like vicars weren't for it and priests were against it. It's 'not nature'. And 'in time you will get pregnant'.

MJ: Yes. So what do you think about—what did the patients think in the very early days before replacements were occurring where they were just really trying to perfect the egg recovery technique and get the fertilization and development working, because those patients didn't have any chance of pregnancy, did they?

SC: No not really. They did know.

MJ: They did know that.

SC: They did know that, yes.

MJ: So why did they do it? Do you know?

SC: Well, I think they were hoping that they would be the one that would be successful.

MJ: So you mean ultimately that they would be taken onto the programme and with transfers done and so, yeah. So they were doing it in altruistic sense to help themselves, but others as well?

SC: Yes.

MJ: And you discussed that with them, did you?

SC: Yes.

MJ: And they were happy about that.

SC: They were quite happy about it.

MJ: Good. And what about the patients that had multiple attempts, because I mean P38 I think had ten attempts?

SC: Yes. It was very stressful for them.

MJ: Yeah. But they knew the odds and they were willing to have a go at that, were they?

SC: Yes. I think all of them that came hoped that they would be the, you know, it would be successful and if not they would get another try.

MJ: Do you know how many of the patients that were treated at Bourn subsequently were people who tried at Oldham and been unsuccessful? Were there many or just a few?

SC: Just a few.

MJ: Right. Do you remember any problem patients in particular?

SC: No, I can't say I do.

MJ: There was no ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome or anything like that?

SC: No.

MJ: No major infections or anything like that?

SC: No.

MJ: There was no significant morbidity or damage from the laparoscopy?

SC: No, no. I can honestly say that myself.

MJ: Sorry?

SC: I had two laparoscopies myself [Note added by SC: for an ectopic and for sterilization], and funnily enough when I went to a hospital they could not believe I had a laparoscopy because you couldn't see the marks.

MJ: Yes, okay, fine. But so what about the funding of the work? Do you know how that worked? Did you used to get paid for doing the IVF work?

SC: Patrick used to pay us sometimes, yes. Out of his own pocket.

MJ: Out of his own pocket? How much did he pay you? [Note added by SC: £10.00]

SC: Well I don't know really. He just used to give it to Miss [Muriel] Harris.

MJ: Do you know how the rest of the work was funded?

SC: The rest? No, I don't actually. [Note added by SC: there was a lady who gave a donation]

MJ: Okay. So anything you regret about your working time there?

SC: None whatsoever. None whatsoever. And when I went down to Bourn, I loved it.

MJ: You did?

SC: I did. The people were so friendly, and the work interesting, and I made many friends who live there.

MJ: And was that the best thing about having worked there?

A: Yes. I remember the first year when it opened - it was the year they had a bonfire actually. And Mr. Steptoe was like Wurzel Gummage when he came out, he wore Wellington's and a long coat. And his cap on his head.

MJ: This would have been 1980, would it?

SC: And Bob used to drive the tractor around and cut the grass. It was a laugh.

MJ: Yeah that's great. So we've got a reference in the papers we've been looking at to two people who we think helped out with egg recovery in the first six months of 1974 called Ian (IF), who we think is Ian Ferguson, and someone called Joe (JS). Do you remember anybody who helped out with egg recovery in those days?

SC: No.

MJ: They would have been visitors. They were there for about six months I think. But you can't remember who?

SC: No because there were quite a few people that came to watch the laparoscope and these were on general wards.

MJ: Yes, okay. Is there anything else I should have asked you about, anything else you want to tell me?

SC: I think it was a marvelous thing. I would have loved for it to stay in Oldham, but I think it was a good thing that it did move down to Cambridge because I don't think the pressure on him and all the people was as much as if it would have been in Oldham.

MJ: On Bob that is you mean, yeah. I think that is probably right actually.

SC: I mean Bob was up and down the motor-way like a yo-yo. But I can't say anybody who I know that was on the team moaned about it. We used to laugh. "Oh, look at the time, eggs again at this time of the morning," or this time of night. And I remember sitting one New Year's Eve with Noni on the steps waiting for Patrick to arrive.

MJ: They were fairly tough times weren't they?

SC: Yes they were. And we had an awful lot of stress from the Press, and they would go into the dining room and so on.

MJ: Did you personally experience those sorts of problems?

SC: Yes. There were people asking is "Mrs. Brown here?" because obviously she was moved few times.

MJ: So that was mainly about when Lesley Brown was there, was it?

SC: Yes it was.



MJ: Right, good. Well I think actually we've covered most of the things I wanted to ask you about. So have you got anything else you want to tell me?

SC: Apart from him [Steptoe] working on the gyn[aecological] side, he was a wonderful organist.

MJ: He was a very good organist and pianist.

SC: He played the organ at the church where I used to go up for the last service. And it was beautiful. And from experience if any of his staff were ill he was marvellous.

MJ: Have you got somebody there with you that's helping you?

SC: Yes. It's a friend. I'm blind, you see.

MJ: Oh okay. I'm sorry to hear that. So when I send you the consent form will there be somebody there to read it to you so you can sign it? And if I send you a transcript will somebody be able to go through it with you?

SC: Yes. And I do think that Jean Purdy was missed when you went down to Bourn when she died.

MJ: Yes. She was very much missed I think. I think she was very underappreciated in a way.

SC: Bob took that very, very hard.

MJ: He did. I went to her funeral and it was the first time I've seen him cry.

SC: And I watched him burn all the old — she had a habit of collecting old-fashioned sewing machines, and I watched him burn them all. It was so tragic.

MJ: Really, oh dear. That's a pity. Jean was a great loss. Is there anything in particular about her you remember?

SC: Actually at the time we looked very much alike. But I always got on with Jean. You know, — nothing was too much trouble. If you needed any help, she'd help.

MJ: In what sort of ways?

SC: Well if we were a little bit short maybe in the theatre, when we were collecting the eggs that went into special kits, she used to come out of the lab part and collect them off us at the theatre door and go round and help with things generally really.

MJ: Okay yes, because she was a qualified state registered nurse, wasn't she?

SC: Yes she was, yes.

MJ: But she didn't actually work in theatre normally.

SC: Yes she did. Well it was so unfortunate that Miss Harris who did a lot at the beginning of the work with Mr. Steptoe, it was so unfortunate that she wasn't there when the baby [Louise Brown] was born. She was on a holiday down in Devon.

MJ: Yes. Were you there when the baby was born?

SC: No. I came in afterwards.

MJ: Because Noni came in later as well, didn't she?

SC: Yes she did.

MJ: I gather Noni used to pick you up.

SC: Yes. And that's why Ms. Harris set off straight away from Cornwall, and unfortunately she'd just got to Manchester when she heard it on radio.

MJ: So was Jean in theatre when the baby was born?

SC: Well yes. I have a photograph of her and Bob.

MJ: Yes. I'm sure I've got a copy of that, yeah.

SC: And it's Bob's copy. And I have a copy of the team of people.

MJ: Do you? Would it be possible for you to make a copy of that to send to me?

SC: Yes, I will.

MJ: Because if you could scan it as well that would be great if you could get somebody to scan it and send it to me electronically.

SC: Yes, I will do.

MJ: That would be lovely, okay. Anything else you'd like to tell me or talk about?

SC: No. It was so wonderful; it's just unfortunate that they didn't get recognized sooner. Very sad indeed.