

Witness Name: Rodney Prosser

Statement No.: WITN0142/001

Exhibits: WITN0142/002 - 006

Dated:

02 JAN 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RODNEY JOHN PROSSER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 26 October 2018.

I, Rodney John Prosser, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Rodney Prosser. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry. I am a retired company director. My wife and I have been married for 52 years and we have two daughters together.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus ("HCV"), which I contracted as a result of being given contaminated Factor VIII to treat my mild haemophilia A.
3. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment that I received and the devastating impact it has had on my life and the rest of my family.
4. I confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me with my statement. My wife and one of my daughters also assist me.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was infected with the HCV on 7 March 1986 at Poole General Hospital ("PGH") in Dorset, when I was given Factor VIII clotting factor following a sporting injury.
6. I have always loved playing sport including football, squash and golf. Once in 1962, while I was playing football, another player kneed me in the back: I remember I was 19 years old. I managed to play football the following week, but collapsed when I got home. Initially the doctor thought that I had appendicitis that had lead to peritonitis. I suffered internal bleeding around the kidney and had to undergo an operation, the doctors couldn't stop the bleeding and they had to tie off a vein to stop it.
7. After that operation I was diagnosed with mild haemophilia A. I have between 27 and 29 per cent Factor VIII blood-clotting protein activity in my blood, where 50 being the lowest of the norm and 100 being the highest.
8. At that time there weren't specific medicines I could take to treat haemophilia; if you had a bleed you were given frozen plasma although I never had this if it was available at that time. After my operation they put a drain in my body and it took me about four or five weeks to get over it. I recovered and I started playing football again.
9. Life with mild haemophilia was okay. I would have to go see the haematologist at Royal Bournemouth Hospital for a check-up every six months to check that I hadn't had any bleeds; this always seemed like a bit of a waste of time and that it didn't achieve much.
10. I played football for the combined schools and subsequently Southampton football club whose physiotherapist realised that if I had a knock I would be out for about a month, so I had to miss a lot of games. I have to say that I didn't change my lifestyle; I just had to live with it. Luckily I have a very strong bone structure, but it's the joints that suffer, mainly my knees and ankles.
11. Shortly after my diagnosis I went with my uncle and cousin to the Haemophilia Centre in Oxford

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12. I have only been given blood products twice in my life; the first time was when I was given frozen plasma for a wisdom tooth extraction. The second time was on 7 March 1986 when I was given Factor VIII.
13. On 6 March I was playing football and sustained a laceration above my right eye with a haematoma surrounding the eye. I exhibit a medical report dated 6 March 1986 from PGH that describes my injuries [WITN0142/002]. A friend of mine took me to PGH. At that time I was very much aware of Human Immunodeficiency Virus ("HIV") because it affected haemophiliacs and it had featured in the media. So, when I was admitted to the hospital I specifically and clearly stated that under no circumstances were they to give me any Factor VIII. I didn't want there to be any risk whatsoever of being infected.
14. After I was admitted they gave me stiches to fix the laceration. Because of my haemophilia they aired on the side of caution and advised me to stay in overnight so that I could remain under observation. I followed their advice, so that if my injury flared up I was in the right place for any treatment.
15. At around 1:00 am, while I was dozing, I felt a prick in my arm; I looked up to see the Doctor Radford putting a needle into my wrist. I thought that maybe it was a drip, but when I looked closer there was a clear dome whizzing around on a trolley. By this time the blood was already going into my body. Doctor Radford said that he had been advised by the haematologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Boscombe to give me Factor VIII and that I didn't have to worry because it was heat-treated, and were perfectly safe at that time. I exhibit a miscellaneous haematology request dated 6 March 1986 written by Doctor Radford at PGH that confirms the advice that he received and the quantity of Factor VIII that he administered [WITN0142/003]. I said that I did not want it and I had made that very clear at the desk when I was admitted. If you expressly say that you

do not want Factor VIII then you don't expect them to give it to you. I was discharged the following day and I went home.

16. The Factor VIII that I was given consisted of one bag from the National Health Service ("NHS") and three bags from Armour Pharmaceuticals Limited. The Armour bags had a warning on the side of the box that stated this product could contain Hepatitis. That name stuck in my mind and then in 1990 I was reminded of it once again when the BBC televised the Cook Report. It reported on Armour's conduct and highlighted the human tragedy of people being infected through taking their blood products and the damning evidence that they ignored back in the 1980's.
17. Six weeks later I started to feel awful: I remember that I was aware of an abnormal metallic type smell. I was heavily jaundiced and I went down with acute Hepatitis. My wife has reminded me that I went bright yellow and that I was vomiting up blood. My general practitioner ("GP") came to visit me at home because I was flat on my back. He knew straight away what was wrong because he had received a letter from Doctor Radford advising him that I would need a follow up due to the slight risk of hepatitis following the Factor VIII received. I exhibit a letter dated 14 March 1986 from Doctor Radford at PGH to my GP informing him that I had been given Factor VIII and that there was a risk of hepatitis [WITN0142/004]. My GP said that there was nothing they could give me to alleviate it; my body had to fight it. That took a long time; I was unwell for about six months. From there on my life took a downward turn.
18. The doctors ran some blood tests and the results came back on 18 April 1986. My GP explained to me that I had what was then known as non-A, non-B Hepatitis ("NANB"). They didn't know the structure of the virus at the time; it wasn't until the late 1980's that it was discovered and named Hepatitis C.
19. My GP told me that I had to be very careful of cross-contamination, especially with family and people that were close to me. If I had a cut then I must cover it. He also informed me that it could develop into cirrhosis and eventually liver cancer. He was very explicit and

- explained all the risks to me; at the end of our conversation I was fully aware.
20. I have been asked if I was given adequate information to understand and manage the infection, and although my GP was very helpful in explaining things we had to look most things up ourselves.
 21. As soon as I knew that I had NANB I immediately stopped drinking any alcohol because I know that is poisonous to your liver; I also quit smoking. I got rid of anything that could affect my liver and my wife, bless her, would look out for things that were good for me.
 22. After it was determined that it was the contaminated Factor VIII that gave me NANB, my GP told me that they had to test me for HIV. At this stage the doctors were very much more aware of the whole situation and what was going on, than the patients. It was like a ticking time bomb; maybe they had circulars within the medical profession. These tests were all conducted within a six-week period: I remember it was a very stressful period and especially hard for my wife, considering everything else that was going on. Luckily I had not been infected with HIV.
 23. After my diagnosis we tried to carry on with our lives as best as we could. Most of my care was through my GP and it wasn't until the 1990's that the hospitals became involved.

Section 3. Other Infections

24. I do not believe that as a result of being given infected blood products I have contracted any infection other than the HCV. Although I remember that I did receive a letter from the NHS informing me that I had an additional risk of getting Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease because I had received "implicated plasma products". I exhibit a letter dated 7 September 2004 from the NHS Health Protection Agency entitled 'variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and plasma products information for patients' [WITN0142/005].

Section 4. Consent

25. I have been asked if I believe that I have ever been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent and the answer is no, I have always consented to the treatments apart from the initial factor 8 treatment at Poole Hospital on 7 March 1986.
26. I do believe that I have been treated without being given the information about treatments. The liver nurses were often economical with the truth and they would give statistics that the medications were proven to be around 85 per cent effective just because they wanted people to take them. I was convinced that what they were saying was the truth, so I was induced to have the treatments; but nobody explained the possible side effects to me. I should have been given more information. A lot of these treatments were in their infancy so we were essentially guinea pigs and they were more or less clinical trials. Thankfully my GP gave me some very good advice, he said: "if I were you I would wait until one comes along that's been proven". On no occasion was I seen by a consultant at Royal Bournemouth Hospital. I did see Professor Arthur at Southampton Hospital when first diagnosed but because of the travelling, he suggested Bournemouth be more convenient to me.
27. My wife has reminded me of the time when I was taking Ribavirin and I was experiencing terrible breathing difficulties; I was very short of breath. I asked the nurse whether anyone else had experienced these side effects and he said that they had not. They sent me for a chest X-ray and the radiographer told me that he had seen a lot of people who took Ribavirin having the same complications. My nurse would have been fully aware of such complications, but failed to disclose the information about the negative effects to me.

Section 5. Impact

28. The mental and physical effects that I suffered as a result of being infected with the HCV were and still are profound. A predominant

symptom is bouts of lethargy. Some mornings I get up and it's fine and other mornings it's overwhelming; it's up and down. It's like waking up and sometimes the light will turn on, but other mornings it won't and I feel extremely tired.

29. Another effect I suffer is serious brain fog. I noticed quite a distinct fall-off from the sharpness of my brain. From time to time I would be physically sick, depending on what I ate. I have to be extra careful and my wife gives me food that is good for the liver. Also, when I was under a lot of stress all these symptoms got worse and I experienced awful pains across my stomach. When we were on holiday in Spain I had terrible pains and I went grey, but even in that case the nurses didn't seem to care.
30. From my searches I understand that sometimes the virus lays dormant, but when it's active the physical and mental effects flare up and I become very aware of it. When the virus is active I feel very low. During these times I also come out in rashes and experience extreme itchiness: my legs itch like hell and my circulation isn't good either.
31. Hepatitis C has led to further serious medical conditions: in 2011 progressed to cirrhosis. This in turn caused Hepatocellular Carcinoma ("HCC"). I remember that when the doctors diagnosed it on 13 April 2016, I had just finished my fourth anti-viral treatment for the HCV and we went in for the results. The doctor told me that the treatment didn't work and the virus had come back. He then told me about the HCC and explained that the tumours will keep growing and that although they can't stop that, they can try to control them. He gave me a prognosis of four to nine months.
32. Another medical condition that has started to give me problems and is associated with chronic Hepatitis C is diabetes. Around five years ago I started experiencing a lot of the common symptoms like a dry mouth and numb feet, but I didn't know what that meant at the time. It wasn't until I went to see the doctor about a rash that she tested me and she found out that my blood sugar level was very high: it was 22. I was diagnosed with type II diabetes, and since then I have to closely monitor it.

33. I had so many medical complications all related to the HCV that if I think about it, it's simply dreadful. My immune system has always been busy fighting the HCV and it is during these low periods that all sorts of problems.
34. Over the years I have been given four courses of anti-viral treatments for the HCV: frustratingly none of the drugs have worked. I received my first treatment of Interferon on 28 December 1995. Then around 2000 I went on my second course of Interferon coupled with Ribavirin. The third course consisted of Ribavirin with Pegylated Interferon. The fourth and final treatment that I received in 2016 was Sofosbuvir with Ribavirin.
35. In total I have been on anti-viral drugs for 13 months, during which I was virtually out of action. They all failed and I believe the reason is because I have such a high viral load of Hepatitis C that they didn't work at all. This was proved by the short incubation period and acute strain that I initially came down with in April 1986.
36. I have also received medical treatment for HCC. Shortly after my diagnosis my consultant referred me to a leading liver specialist at the Royal Free Hospital in London, he looked at all of my scans and Transarterial Chemoembolization ("TACE") as the best treatment available at that time. This is a procedure where they shoot radioactive beads up through the arteries to try to block the blood supply to the tumours in the liver. I had five of these treatments and I was hoping to have a sixth, but things have progressed on from there so that will not be possible. I exhibit a letter dated 27 September 2018 from my consultant physician and gastroenterologist at Bournemouth Digestive Diseases Centre that outlines my current diagnosis and active problems [WITN0142/006].
37. I asked the specialist if there were other treatments in the pipeline and he said that there are, but the problem is that we have to get rid of the HCV before these become a viable option. The TACE has given me an extra year and a half. One of the main problems that I now have is the accumulation of the liquids from the liver; we need to see if they can relieve that.

38. I have been asked whether I faced any difficulties or obstacles in accessing treatment; I do not believe that I have. My consultant has actually been very good, they advised me to have the treatments.
39. I do not believe that there are any other treatments that have been made available to me. NHS has recently offered me the latest anti-viral drugs to treat the HCV, but considering the awful side effects I suffered from the four previous courses and the fact that they didn't work, I am reluctant to try them. As I mentioned above my main issue is that I'm unable to clear from the HCV, so I'm not a suitable candidate for the newest HCC treatments.
40. As a consequence of the treatments I underwent to treat HCV I have suffered both mental and physical effects. When I was first given Interferon I was meant to complete a three-month course, but I was too unwell to finish it. The Ribavirin gave me severe breathing difficulties and mentally I didn't feel safe going out, so I stayed in most of the time.
41. I have always been desperate to get rid of HCV. I went on all the possible treatments hoping that they would work; it is a big downer after the ordeal that I have been through to find out that all the cures have failed. Every time the doctors told me that the therapy didn't work, depression started to haunt me.
42. Because of the infection I have experienced difficulties in medical treatments. HCV put pressure on the artery at the base of my stomach and the doctors were concerned that it would blow up, so they wanted to put elastic bands around to strengthen the artery. Initially the only option they gave me was to carry out the procedure with an instrument that had been used on people that had other infections. In the end I had to wait for them to send a sterile instrument down from Scotland.
43. I also found it extremely difficult to get dental treatment. My dentist always wanted to see me last because he would either have to sterilise everything or throw the equipment away. Later my haematologist transferred me to the hospital where they were better equipped to provide me with dental care.

44. Before HCV took its toll on my health I was always very social. All of the sport I used to play kept me fit and I really enjoyed the social aspect. My wife and I played squash together in the Dorset league. As HCV progressed I had to give up sport. We also used to catch up with friends and to go out a lot more.
45. There is a definite stigma associated with HCV that I have witnessed first hand over the years. My really close friends have been supportive, but others have not been quite as understanding. When I went away on golfing trips the other men didn't want to share a room with me because they were worried that they might pick something up. So I was isolated.
46. I remember another occasion when my wife and I went out for dinner with some friends. The lady sitting next to me accidentally picked up my water glass and went to drink from it, when she realised that it was mine she made a scene and shuddered.
47. I have always been a hard worker and I'm inquisitive by nature, so in every company I worked, when I got to the stage where I wasn't enjoying it anymore or there was no room for growth I would move on and look for the next challenge.
48. In April 1986 when I first came down with acute Hepatitis C I was making a very good living. I was coming to the end of my role as a national sales manager at a lighting company before going into the microwave business. While I was ill we found out that the microwave business had a big debt with the Inland Revenue, so I never pursued that. When I started to recover I immediately found a new job, thanks to some very good friends with useful contacts who invited me work for them when I felt well enough.
49. However, when I finally started to get some strength back I found that I could only cope with working part-time. The lethargy heavily impacted my ability to concentrate and to work. This part-time wage was a huge negative change in our lives, especially in comparison to what we were accustomed to; we really missed that income. I also had to take a lot of sick days, which wasn't easy when you are only entitled to six months of statutory sick pay per year.

50. I have always managed to make the best of what I have been left with, but there is no doubt that HCV had a big impact on my career, professional opportunities and vocational ability. I was infected at 43 when I was at my highest earning potential; from thereon my income was nowhere near what I should have achieved. HCV forced me into early retirement and I had to stop working when I was 58. By that stage I was a director of a company. But one of the main problems that I was suffering from was brain fog, I couldn't keep on working in that condition.
51. The negative financial effects of HCV are far reaching. As I mentioned previously there would be times where I had no income at all and when I could work I had to live on a part-timers salary whilst supporting my family. I don't think that there was any financial help available at the time. We had to be extremely careful with money; we couldn't afford to do all the things that we were used to when I was earning a good living, socialising, but we simply had to cope with it.
52. My wife has been a wonderful support to me throughout my illness. She has always taken care of me and she makes sure that everything that she gives me is good for the liver. At the end of the day I do believe that she has not been able to do all of the things that she really deserved. Sometimes we couldn't go to places we would have loved to simply because I was too unwell.
53. My two daughters have been absolutely brilliant through the whole thing. They even paid for my wife and I to go away for our silver wedding anniversary. We have all been a bit emotional at times.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

54. I remember that only once the GP offered me psychological support and I accepted it. I had been stressed for quite sometime by a combination of factors, problems at work and a bad renovation. But the real root of the problem was Hepatitis C; it meant that I couldn't cope with things. My problems all piled up and became too much for me.

55. The counsellor gave me some fairly basic advice, but it did help. I took in what she said, and I implemented her techniques to de-stress as much as possible. This included things like taking the time to relax and listen to music. In hindsight, although my GP was there throughout the early stages and offered some great advice, it would have been better if I had been offered support sooner, as when I was first infected I went through a really hard time. These days the doctors don't get to know you, so they cannot offer the same level of support.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

56. In 2011 my haematologist told me that financial assistance was available. I had to make an initial phone call to register with the Skipton Fund and after that the application process was straightforward. I have to say that initially they were actually quite good.
57. But recently I have lost confidence in the Fund. I spoke with them because I am concerned about how my wife will be looked after when I'm gone. At the moment widow's bereavement is a one off payment of £10,000, which works out at roughly £200 per week. That's not a lot when you have so many outgoings like community tax. Skipton Trust will pay 3 monthly payments after death for my wife. I have since been told that they are paid in quarters, April, May and June, however if I die in May only one payment will be made which conflicts with the original payment structure, why? I'm not sure if somebody at the Trust originally misinformed me or if they have changed the rules, but it all seems very arbitrary and unfair.

Section 8. Other Issues

58. We were the first people to go against the NHS for treatment with infected blood products. We instructed a law firm called Turners and the litigation was divided into two parts: firstly, we had to prove our legal claim and secondly, we had to deal with the quantum. Our main

argument was based on a clause about cancer and the fact that we were told that HCV would take 30 years to progress to cirrhosis and HCC. The quantum was difficult for us: it was difficult to fully understand the whole concept and if we didn't accept the offer we would have lost everything. So we had to accept it or put it in the hands of the lawyers: it was a balancing act.

59. I am a member of the Haemophilia Society, but through the years I have become disillusioned with them.
60. There are a few concerns that I would like to address:
61. In the letter from PGH to my GP [WITN0142/04], Doctor Radford states "He told us he was "mildly haemophiliac" and had been given Factor VIII in the past". This information is not true, I had never been given Factor VIII before and I definitely didn't say that. As I mentioned previously what I did tell them when I was admitted to the hospital was that I didn't want them to give me any Factor VIII.
62. I encountered some difficulties when applying for the disability living allowance. I was turned down twice and then I appealed the third rejection. I had to see a tribunal panel in Bournemouth and I have never been so humiliated in my whole life. We really had to fight for it and we fought for it by ourselves. The appeal panel was made up of counsellors and one doctor, as soon as the doctor heard our case he said yes straight away.
63. A lot of previous inquiries have glossed over issues, they didn't have the teeth to be able to call people in and compel them to provide evidence. This Inquiry has more power and I would like Sir Brian to make sure that those who are culpable, like politicians, are held accountable for the decisions they made that affected haemophiliacs, those that were infected through transfusions, and the outcomes that they ignored. Those that are responsible need to be brought to justice.
64. I would also like for the Inquiry to influence the politicians and to recommend that all the spouses, who are part and parcel of the whole thing, be taken care of. As an individual, I am taken care of quite well from a financial point of view, but it's when I'm gone that I'm worried

about. My wife then reverts back to what is left and I would hate for her to struggle. There must be a provision for spouses so that they are not just cast aside; I get rather emotional thinking about it. My main concern is that my wife is looked after when I'm no longer here.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

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Dated 16th Dec 2018