Witness Name: Brendan O'Dolan
Statement No.: **WITN0436001**
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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BRENDAN O'DOLAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 21 September 2018. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I, Brendan O'Dolan, will say as follows: -

Introduction

1. My name is Brendan O'Dolan. My date of birth is GRO-C 1968 and I was born in Scotland. My address is known to the Inquiry.

1.1. I can confirm that I have chosen not to have a legal representative and that I was happy for the Inquiry team to take my statement.

1.2. In this statement, I intend to speak about my infection through the Hepatitis C virus. In particular, how I was infected, how the Hepatitis C virus has affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it has had on me.

How Infected

2. I contracted Hepatitis C subtype 3a following transfusions, which I received from 29 October 1982 to 5 April 1983 after a serious road traffic accident. I was 14 years old at that time.

Background

2.1. I was a passenger in a car that my friend was driving when it crashed on Friday, 29 October 1982. I sustained significant injuries, including severe compound fractures to both Femurs.

2.2. I remember being conscious at the time: I was put on a stretcher and lifted into an ambulance. I was then taken to Lewisham Hospital on Lewisham High Street, London.

2.3. I remember going through the hospital doors and shouting out "please help me, I'll never walk again". I remember closing my eyes and it feeling really nice, and then I was gone. It says on the one-page summary of my accident that I was resuscitated (**WITN0436002**). When I read that for the first time in 2016 it brought tears to my eyes.

2.4. I remember waking up in the recovery room, perhaps the next day, where my legs were heavily bandaged after an operation to clean out the road debris from inside my legs and to stop the major bleeding. My arms were padded up to support many drips - blood was one of the many drips.

2.5. I was then transferred to the intensive care unit awaiting further surgery. After more intense surgery, continuous drips and approximately 5 days in the intensive care unit, I was transferred to ward B2. I was not allowed in a children's ward because the doctors and nurses at the hospital were worried about the other children playing with all the tubes and drips, which I was hooked up to.

2.6. There were monitors and tubes everywhere: up my nose, down my throat, multiple drips in both my arms, a urinary catheter and bags everywhere. The doctors told my Mum and Dad that I might not make it.

2.7. My Mum and brothers told me that I was given blood during the operation and afterwards too. I remember the nurses changing the blood bags for new blood bags afterwards in the intensive care unit and on the ward. I know this because I remember them changing the bags on more than one occasion. It was uncomfortable having so many drips causing bruising of my wrists and my arms.

2.8. Although it does not explicitly say that I had blood transfusions on the one-page summary (**WITN0436002**), it does say that I was treated with IV fluids. Blood is an IV fluid.

2.9. My doctor recently told me that if you break your femur, you lose about 1.5 litres of blood in each leg and it does not matter who you are. This would mean you would have to have a blood transfusion. I broke two femurs and suffered multiple compound fractures where the bones come through the skin. I think I had 4-5 bags of blood, although

I cannot be sure. However these are the only blood transfusions I have had: I have never taken drugs intravenously and I do not have tattoos.

2.10. When they gave me blood transfusions at the hospital, they did not give me any information or advice about the risks of infection as I was a child when I had the accident. My Mum was by my side during my recovery though. As far as I know, they did not give her any information or advice about the risks of the blood transfusions.

2.11. Every Monday, the surgeons would gather around my bed and discuss my progress for their weekly rounds. Since finding out about my infection through the Hepatitis C virus, a memory from one of those weekly rounds came back to me. I remember some consultants, other doctors and nurses conferring at the end of my bed: I became a great study for everyone. They were saying something to the effect of, "It won't affect him now, but it will when he is in his forties". It could have been a reference to my leg injuries, but it could also have been reference to Hepatitis C or some other blood infection that I have not yet found out about.

2.12. I was in hospital for almost six months. I remember the doctors' and nurses' names: I was part of the furniture. The staff were amazing to me. Anna Delahunty was one of the auxiliary nurses - she was fantastic. The consultant who treated me was called Dr Spencer – I believe he specialised in nerve endings. There were three other top surgeons looking after me: Dr Stahl (the orthopaedic registrar), Mr CP Monty (the surgeon) and Dr Boobyer.

Discovery of the Hepatitis C virus

2.13. In early 2016 I went to my GP for a general blood test, which I have every few years for my own well-being. My GP noticed that my liver enzymes were a bit high when she received my results. She asked if I drank alcohol or ate fatty foods – I said I did, but only a bit. I was a pretty healthy eater.

2.14. After cutting out alcohol and fatty foods altogether from the advice of my GP for 6 weeks, I had another blood test and my liver enzymes were even higher. This ruled out alcohol being the cause of the higher enzymes in my liver.

2.15. After more blood tests, scans and appointments, my GP asked me a number of questions about my past, including if I had been in any trauma accidents. I explained to her that I was involved in an accident as a child and I had blood transfusions, so she asked if we could test for Hepatitis. I did not know what it was at the time, so she explained it all to me and we went ahead with the test.

2.16. When the results came back in April 2016 I felt horror, shock, panic. I felt like it was the end. I had been diagnosed with Hepatitis C subtype 3a.

2.17. I am glad I had a blood transfusion, but that is not the point. You have trust in the government. If it were an accident, you might be able to forgive them. But when you read where they got the blood from you think someone has made up some sort of horror story. It sends shivers down your spine. I might as well have licked blood off the street – I would have had less chance of getting infected.

2.18. My GP has been fantastic, she has been amazing. If I had had any other doctor, I believe they would have said just fix your diet and stop drinking. That was what happened back in 2007 when I was seen by Dr GRO-D at GRO-D Clinic in Harley Street. My liver enzymes were high then too. Dr GRO-D told me that they were not dangerously high, and advised me to cut out fatty foods, spicy foods, and cut down on drinking. When I split up with my wife in 2005, I did drink a bit too much so I did not think much of it.

2.19. My GP was thorough though. She read my results and said there was definitely something going on. When I found out about the Hepatitis, she gave me a lot of verbal advice and referred me to the Hepatology team at the Royal London Hospital.

Other Infections

3. After discovering that I was infected, my GP and I thought it would be best if I was tested for HIV too. The HIV testing clinic was horrible. My daughter, who was 19 years old at the time (and 20 years old now), came with me. You could see people down the corridors getting treated for HIV and they did not look very well. You could tell that a lot of the people there were drug addicts still to this day, even while being treated for HIV.

3.1. They asked all sorts of invasive questions about my sexual history. I felt as though I had AIDS and that I was dirty. I could not look at my daughter. We were just sitting there in this horrible clinic waiting to be seen, not looking at each other. That is trauma.

3.2. The test came back thankfully as clear for HIV but it was a horrible experience.

Consent

4. I consented to the treatment of the infection with Mavyret tablets and I was given adequate information before undergoing this treatment.

4.1. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of any other treatment or testing on me without my knowledge.

Impact

Mental and physical impact of the infection

5. After the accident, I started to forget things sometimes and felt like I was fighting fatigue. Growing up I had to keep up with my two brothers and I was always tired, always weak. I did not have any stamina. I swam regularly (and still do) but before I could never keep up with other people; people that I knew were not as fit as me. I thought I was just a weaker person.

5.1. Everyone that I have met over the years seemed to have that spark, but I have always felt exhausted and a little gloomy. I thought it was because of my job: I am a cab driver and driving is tiring. I started when I was 22 years old. I did not know what was wrong but since finding out I was infected with Hepatitis C, everything makes sense.

Other medical complications as a result of the infection

5.2. I have suffered from Urticaria severely from about the age of 15; I had the blood transfusions at the age of 14. You get it absolutely everywhere: your lips swell up, you get it in your private parts. You cannot work with it when you have a flare up, so it affected my ability to work over the past 30 years. When you have it, you feel on edge and you can go into anaphylactic shock.

5.3. I went to see a Dermatologist at Orpington Hospital in my 20s and was tested for food allergies. They could not figure out what it was. They did not test me for anything else. I was given tablets for Urticaria to help relieve the symptoms but it did not cure it.

5.4. Prior to starting my treatment for Hepatitis C in October 2017, I had a bad bout of Urticaria. However since treatment, I have not had it at all. I have not had complete confirmation that the two are linked but the timelines add up completely. I spoke to my GP and told her that I had not had it since my treatment. She said it was worth making a note of that.

5.5. Whilst I was waiting for the Hepatitis C treatment, I was having bloods taken more or less every month. I had several ultrasounds and fibroscans, which indicated that I had fibrosis. The doctors said there was mild scarring on my liver. They also found haemangioma - a collection of small blood vessels that form a lump in the liver. It is not a tumour, but it can develop into a tumour. They also found a cyst on my kidney. They were not too concerned about either of those things though.

Treatment for the infection

5.6. In early to mid-2016, I was told by the head nurse at the Royal London Hospital that I could have the old treatment for Hepatitis C there and then if I wanted, but she recommended waiting for the new treatment. She explained all the pros and cons of each treatment, and described the process for getting the new treatment. I was told that I would be put on a priority list, which ranks how sick you are and how much anxiety you have.

5.7. I researched the old treatment - interferon - and saw how horrible the side effects were. You cannot say that interferon is an acceptable form of treatment. So I took the decision to wait for the new treatment.

5.8. I had to wait 18 months for the treatment. During this time, I was terrified that I would infect my partner. I was terrified I would develop cancer. I knew that the virus affects people more in their late forties, and I was exactly that age. I could feel the dirt running through the blood in my veins. I felt sick.

5.9. I had to essentially wait because the government would not pay the pharmaceutical companies to release the drugs. That is not fair: that is not right. A drug addict who has not worked or contributed to taxes gets treated before me because he is sicker, even though the government infected me in the first place.

5.10. I had to go down the emotional route with the Hepatology team to speed up the treatment. I had to basically beg them to speed up my waiting time for the treatment because I felt that it was emotionally affecting me. Why should the NHS be waiting for me to become sicker, costing them more money when they could have treated me sooner and it would cost the health service less money?

5.11. I started the treatment in October 2017 and finished on 21 December 2017. I was prescribed a course of Mavyret over two months: I took three big tablets a day. During the treatment, I had a small amount of itching and a mild headache, but those things could have been anything. You can drive with Mavyret - you can do everything with it - so I did not have to stop working. I have not had any other issues.

5.12. The Hepatology specialist team compared my old blood tests with the new blood tests in December 2017. After 1 month of taking Mavyret all of my liver enzymes had come back down to normal. I have my next check-up in November 2018, but the chart shows I am Hepatitis C free. I still have a natural fear that it might come back, even though the doctors told me that there is a 97% cure rate with Mavyret.

5.13. After finding out I had Hepatitis C, my infected status did impact on my dental visits. I did not go as I was worried I would not get the treatment.

Impact on my private, family and social life

5.14. When I got my results of the virus, I told my current partner first, then my ex-wife. I have been with my partner for 8 years. She knew I was getting blood tests and when she got home from work I had to tell her and we just cried our eyes out. She is such an incredible woman. I could have infected her. I felt like I did not want to live anymore. We were crying and I said sorry and she said there is nothing to be sorry about. GRO-C

5.15. Our love life has been severely affected. This is an emotional effect that has been brought on my having Hepatitis C. The leaflets you get from the nurses tell you to keep everything clean, and use separate tooth brushes. I think about Hepatitis C all the time: it is a constant worry. It sort of takes over your life. Even though doctors have pretty much given me the all clear, I am still scared I will infect her.

5.16. I have three children and one of my daughters was very worried that I was going to die. She had more of an emotional reaction to it. The other two were worried but they were ok. I told a couple of friends just to get it off my chest. They did not stigmatise me – I knew they would not – others would though.

5.17. Since the treatment, my children have said that I have got a bit of spark in me; a bit of a kick. I feel awake for the first time in my life. I told my GP that and she said that a few patients on that treatment had said the same thing.

Education

5.18. In terms of my education, there is one thing that sticks in my mind from my time in hospital after the car accident. When I was well enough on the ward, a tutor came and gave me lessons because I was out of school for so long: it was a legal requirement.

5.19. When I left hospital, I could not go back to my previous school. I had a home tutor for a while, then I was sent to a day centre which was attached to a school near my home at the time. I believe it was Rushey Green School in GRO-C

5.20. Until I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I did not think there was any reason that I went to that particular school. I think I do now.

5.21. I remember sitting next to another kid in one of my classes for remedial children, and I remember him telling me that he was a haemophiliac. That is a word you do not forget. I did not know what haemophilia was so he explained it to me. He told me that there were other haemophiliac children in the class too. I am not sure why I was sent there. Was it because I was weak or was it because they knew we were all infected?

5.22. Could the Health Board have told the London Education Authority that I had Hepatitis C?

5.23. The change of school also had an effect on my education as I was unable to catch up properly and I also lost the incentive to study.

Work-related and financial effects

5.24. My employer gave me a really hard time. I work as a taxi driver. In 2017, my taxi licence was coming to an end - which happens every three years - and I was sent a new application. The application asks if you have any new medical conditions - at that stage I had recently found out about my Hepatitis virus - and at the bottom it says, "If you have a new medical condition and you do not notify us, your licence may be revoked".

5.25. I phoned the DVLA who said that Hepatitis C was not a notifiable condition for driving, and advised me that I did not have to tell them. My doctor also told me I did not have to tell anyone. But under the threat of that form, I felt like I had to put it down. I was terrified of my licence being revoked - it is my livelihood.

5.26. My employer asked me to complete a series of questionnaires and asked my GP to send several letters confirming my status and my medical history (**WITN0436003**). I phoned my employer and told the guy on the phone that Hepatitis C was not even a notifiable condition for driving. I asked why it was taking so long and if they were stigmatising me. He told me that his supervisors were assessing it.

5.27. My GP told me that I could not say I was anxious about my health condition on the questionnaires unless it was really affecting my job because she knew it may affect my licence renewal. The specialist Nurse at the Hepatology clinic had asked me if I was suffering from anxiety and because I had naturally felt anxious about the Hepatitis, had noted my feelings on my application for the new Hepatitis C treatment. On my next appointment I told her I am more concerned than anxious and this was updated on my file to ensure it did not affect my application. That was really tough because I knew it would delay my application for the new Hepatitis C treatment.

5.28. By this time, I only had a few weeks left until my licence expired. That was hell because I would not have been able to work. My licence did finally come through but I found the whole process really upsetting and I am not looking forward to my next renewal in 2020.

Treatment/Care/Support

6. When I found out I was infected with Hepatitis C, I think I was offered counselling. I did contact the Hepatitis C trust and spoke to Samantha

who counselled me enough to reduce my fears of having this disease. She was very kind and helpful and I also attended meeting at the Hepatitis C trust along with my daughter and partner. I was able to deal with it through my own self-help techniques i.e. talking to my friends and family - that was counselling for me. Even speaking to the Inquiry team is a form of counselling for me.

6.1. As I said earlier, there were several delays and issues with receiving treatment which I cannot understand.

6.2. In West Africa, there was the Ebola virus. There was no treatment or cure for it but they have found one and it is very treatable now. Even with Novichok: it is treatable. Hepatitis C, even though it has been known for decades, it has only become treatable in this country since October last year. But one cell of Hepatitis C is very hard to treat – it just multiplies. You cannot stop it. I had one of the hardest strains to treat to date, which is genotype 3A and yet I had to wait.

6.3. Mavyret seems to be the best on the market. But the Hepatitis virus may lay dormant in me for years, I am not sure it will completely clear it. Then there is the fear that this new drug could have an effect on me in some way in the future. I am not planning to, but if I were to have children again I worry that this new drug could have an effect on them. If I did not have Hepatitis C to start with, then I would not have all these things in my head to worry about.

Financial Assistance

7. I heard about the Skipton Fund through my GP.

7.1. My GP filled out the application form to the Skipton Fund for me stating that I had to have had blood transfusions, otherwise I could not have survived the car accident.

7.2. After making the the application, I was asked to send blood tests confirming that I had the Hepatitis antibodies and the Hepatitis genotype. I was also asked to send photographs for them to assess whether the scars on my legs were severe enough to warrant a blood transfusion (**WITN0436005**). This was incredibly emotional as I had to send private and personal pictures to a third party. I sent the letter summarising the treatment that I had when I was 14 too.

7.3. I believe the Skipton Fund knows that records have gone missing. They assess your application using a balance of probabilities approach. They are essentially admitting that they know damn well that you got infected from NHS blood, but that it is very unlikely that you will have the evidence to back it up.

7.4. They reviewed my evidence and approved my application some time in May or June 2016.

7.5. I received a £20,000 lump sum straight away. I now receive monthly stage 1 payments. Last year, it was £250 a month but that has now gone up to £300 a month.

7.6. I was able to reduce my hours once I got the lump sum payment because I was worried that the scans I was having at the time were going to show I had cancer. I was expecting the worst. I did not want to go work because I felt contaminated.

7.7. I do not fall into the stage 2 category for payments because I was not able to say I suffered from severe anxiety. If I had said that, I believe I would have lost my cab licence.

7.8. The money I got from the fund has helped me, but I think it should be more as it is higher in other parts of the UK. It makes me angry to think that people are treated differently because they are "just" a stage 1 category, and because of where they live. As Raymond Bradley QC said during the preliminary hearings, "It's a postcode lottery".

7.9. If my accident had happened in Scotland or Ireland, I would have got more money. But because I happened to have it in England, I get less. The most ironic part is that my parents are Irish born and bred, they moved to Scotland which is where I was born, then they moved down to London when I was two or three months old. That is the irony.

7.10. Another fear I have, which I think everyone who is receiving payments has, is that I have adjusted my life to the payments I get but the money might just stop one day. I have a different way of life now because of the payments. They help to finance bills, mortgages and rent for people. The government will not say when or if it is going to end. The next statement will be released soon – and we are living in fear that they will take away that money. There is just no security or certainty.

7.11. I would like the Inquiry team to recommend that the government provides proper compensation before the Inquiry finishes as proposed by Raymond Bradley QC at the preliminary hearings.

Other Issues

8. There are three other issues I would like to highlight.

8.1. First, the ongoing issues with blood transfusions and hospital care. I did a general search this morning regarding Lewisham Hospital's blood transfusion records and came across a Care Quality Commission report for the hospital from last year (**WITN0436004**). I scrolled through the 185 page report and by chance landed on a

section regarding surgery practices. This is the part I find most concerning:

8.2. *In surgery, we observed numerous breaches of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) policy, potentially placing patients at significant risk of infection.*

8.3. That was from 2017. I cannot believe the problem still exists. I felt that I was meant to see it today.

8.4. A friend of mine with thalassemia died in Greenwich Hospital in 1991/92. He was 22 years old. I remember he had to go to Greenwich Hospital every four to five weeks to get new blood. We used to visit him there.

8.5. I believe that Lewisham Hospital and Greenwich Hospital had the same blood centre – whoever their supplier was. I do not know what he died of exactly, but I know that he had serious liver problems. I think he must have been infected with Hepatitis C too from the transfusions. I learned at the Preliminary Hearings last week that up to 80% of people that had thalassemia were infected with Hepatitis C.

8.6. Second, I have also previously phoned and emailed Lewisham Hospital in 2016 to enquire about the blood transfusions given to me, only to be told that all the records are destroyed after 10 years. Recently I emailed Lewisham Hospital making a Freedom of Information request but I have had no response to date.

8.7. Third, for the Preliminary Hearings' commemoration video I was asked what I would say to a politician if they were put in front of me. My answer did not make the final edit so I would like it heard in my witness statement. I would say: "how would you like it if your 14 year old child was poisoned with infected blood?"

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 5-11-2018.