

Witness Name: Dena Peacock  
Statement No.: WITN1954001  
Exhibits: WITN1954002-WITN1954004  
Dated: 12 February 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DENA PEACOCK

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#### Section 1. Introduction

I, Dena Peacock, will say as follows: -

1. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry.
2. I live with my husband in GRO-C and I work for the Home Office. I have six children and seven grandchildren.

#### Section 2. How Infected

3. I had my first child, a son, in 1980 at the age of 16. Six weeks after delivery, in GRO-C 1980, I went for my postnatal check-up where they found I had afterbirth retained. I was rushed in to Roose Hospital, Barrow-in-Furness, as

an emergency D and C (dilation and curettage) which required a blood transfusion.

4. In 1982, at the birth of my second son, I lost a lot of blood following a forceps delivery at Sharoe Green Hospital, Preston. I was given a blood transfusion after the birth in the early hours of GRO-C 1982. I subsequently had a daughter in 1984, and three more sons in 1989, 1990 and 1993.
  
5. I do not know which blood transfusion resulted in me being given contaminated blood. I do recall that on both occasions I received more than one bag of blood. Both hospitals have subsequently shut down. I have been unable to obtain medical records for either of these two deliveries. Correspondence confirming the loss and destruction of these records. **[WITN1954002 and WITN1954003]**. My GP has subsequently been able to locate one line in my GP records confirming I received a transfusion, GP record. **[WITN1954004]**. My GP has completed my EIBSS application form confirming, *'likely ? from blood transfusion in 1980 for post partum haemorrhage in Barrow-in-Furness. There are no other risk factors'* (EIBSS form available to the Inquiry on request).
  
6. I cannot remember any information or advice being given to me about the risk of being exposed to infection on either occasion. As a result of being given blood I was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV).
  
7. I discovered I had HCV in 2017, over 35 years later. I was not very well in February 2017 and I went to the doctors. The doctor said my liver functions were not working correctly and did a blood test. The result found HCV antibodies and I was referred to the hospital. No information was given to me about the infection at that time.
  
8. When I went to the hospital, I saw a consultant and she did a viral load test to discover whether it was HCV. I then got a phone call saying I had got HCV

and was being referred to a specialist nurse. Again, no information was given to me about the infection.

9. I had to wait almost a month for an appointment with the specialist nurse. We went to see her and had a fibroid scan which was at level 12. I was given no information about what this meant and was given this result in a very matter of fact way. I later learnt through Google that a result of 12.4 is the level for cirrhosis.
10. The specialist nurse explained that she would apply to the CCG for funding to pay for my medication because it was being rationed. She explained that they had spent all the money for that month and it would take six weeks to get to committee again before a decision would be made. The nurse explained that although she would make the application for funding, treatment was not guaranteed. My husband then asked if we could pay for it privately and we received a very abrupt response: it would cost £14,000 and we would not get the services of the specialist nurse. Six weeks later we got the response that treatment would be funded, and then had to wait another two weeks or a month to start the treatment in August 2017.
11. I was not given adequate information to help me understand and manage the infection at any point. In terms of what information, I was given about the risks of others being infected as a result of my infection, I was told to practice safe sex. I was also told that if I spilt blood, I must be the one to wipe it up and to do so with bleach, and that it could be contagious for three months. That is all we were told and that was only because we prompted the specialist nurse for this information. I could only find out more information by Googling. I believe information should have been provided to me earlier, when the HCV was first detected, right at the very beginning. We asked the specialist nurse for a leaflet or something to give us more information but there was nothing.

12. At work they were not supportive and I had to undergo a risk assessment with occupational health. I was already very ill. The supervisor said if you cut yourself use PPE (personal protective equipment). I felt like a leper.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

13. I do not know whether I received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

### **Section 4. Consent**

14. I do not believe that I have been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent but, as set out above, I do believe I have been treated without being given adequate or full information. I do not believe I have been treated for the purposes of research, save in relation to my Barrett's oesophagus (see below), which was with my consent.

### **Section 5. Impact**

15. The mental effects of being diagnosed as infected with HCV have been quite traumatic. I was only diagnosed in 2017 and I think the mental effects of the infection have probably been going on for years. I have suffered bouts of depression for many years. I would end up in bed for three days totally exhausted and wiped out. When I went to the doctors to try to find out what was wrong I was told, 'What do you expect, you have children, crack on'. I had stomach problems as well which I told my GP about and was told it was stress.
16. I suffer from severe anxiety and depression and am on medication for that. After finally cracking in September 2016 I had a year of counselling. It was in February 2017 that I was diagnosed so the counselling spanned this period. When I found out I had HCV that was even more depressing: I felt like the

government had waited for me to die instead of telling me they had infected me. There was never any attempt to contact me, and when I did find out there was no support available.

17. I felt disgusted, dirty. I was newly married and I thought my husband would be disgusted. I was terrified I had infected him somehow as he had suffered liver failure the previous year.
18. As for the physical effects of the infection, I am shattered all the time. I ache and cannot walk long distances. It has to be a good day if we are to go for a walk. I am working but I don't know how long I can work for as it is taking its toll.
19. In terms of further medical conditions which have resulted from the infection, I am under the care of a dermatologist for a skin condition called urticaria. I have acute urticaria which is when the immune system attacks the mast cells in the body which results in a red, itchy, blotchy rash. I get patches where there is friction or pressure, like under my bra straps, and on the bottoms of my feet. I now have an Epi Pen as I also get it in my throat which causes my throat to swell and causes difficulty breathing. I have Barrett's oesophagus and have to have an endoscopy every two years to monitor it. I have two inches of damaged cells in my oesophagus. I also have diverticulitis, and my gall bladder was removed last year. Prior to the operation to remove my gall bladder I was hospitalised twice in acute pain relating to my gall bladder. I have specifically been told that the urticaria and problems with my gall bladder are related to HCV by a consultant. I believe the Barrett's oesophagus may also be linked to HCV.
20. I had treatment for HCV with Sofosbuvir and Ledipasvir in August 2017, finishing in November 2017. The difficulties in accessing this treatment included the delay and the lack of certainty over whether it would be provided to me, as I have explained above.

21. I do not know whether there are other treatments which ought to have been made available to me as I do not know what other treatments are available. I feel that the treatment I was given should have been made available immediately, together with a support network for before you start taking it, whilst you are taking it and following treatment to deal with the lasting effects of the treatment.
22. The mental and physical effects of the treatment were hard to deal with. When I started treatment, I felt depressed and cried a lot. I was emotional and suffered with mood swings. I was very tired: I was in bed a lot, sleeping a lot. I had no appetite and lost three stone. At night time I felt as if ants were running up and down my body.
23. My infected status has never meant I have been refused treatment. But when I was hospitalised for my gall stones I was told off by the paramedic for not mentioning my HCV status.
24. The impact of being infected with HCV has been hard on my relationship with my husband. We had only just got married when I was diagnosed. My husband had been very poorly the year before and had undergone a liver transplant in May 2016 as a result of seronegative hepatitis, less than a year before I was diagnosed. When I was diagnosed I therefore didn't know if I had infected him and been the cause of his liver failure. We went on honeymoon with that hanging over us. I was unable to drink any alcohol

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We still do not know what caused his liver failure. My husband has had to put up with me and has been under quite a lot of stress dealing with my emotions, my depression and the tiredness. I am up and down like a yoyo. He didn't know whether he was going to lose me as we were not given the support and

information when I was diagnosed. I think there are some things he still does not grasp, although he says he does.

25. We had had a traumatic year as it was, and suddenly I had to work out how to explain to my children that I had this disease, GRO-C Trying to figure out the right time to tell my children was very hard. I wanted to tell them one by one, and I didn't want to tell them and go away on honeymoon in case they wanted to ask questions. So when we came back I told my children. I went through it all with them, one by one. I had to explain to them that I was not and had never been a drug addict, and that I suspected I had contracted the infection through contaminated blood in a transfusion, but I didn't have the proof at that time. Waiting for them to get tested was very hard.
26. The impact of my infection on my family's life was very unfair. I wasn't always there for them and it breaks my heart what I had to put them through. All those years when I was undiagnosed, when I was exhausted and too tired, my daughter had to pick up the pieces to help look after the younger ones. She was still a child herself. It is hard to comment on the impact the infection has had on my children because I don't know. I have spoken to them all individually and they have taken it ok, and got on with it. They didn't like seeing me being ill. For them it was a realisation of why I had been so ill throughout the years and spent so much time in bed with fatigue. Everything fell into place for them, like it did for me.
27. The impact of the infection on my social life has also been quite significant. Not everyone knows. If I try to meet up with friends I am often exhausted after an hour and need to come home. If we want to go out to the pictures I have to wait and see how I feel before we go because sometimes I am just too tired.
28. In terms of the stigma associated with HCV, I definitely feel it. I feel like I am a dirty secret that has popped its head up. When I tell people about the infection I don't know what their thoughts are about me. I feel like people are looking at

me and thinking about it. I was a single parent for quite a long while and when I first got diagnosed my husband and I had just got married. I had to reassure him I had never been a drug addict. I was really worried I had infected my husband. It has affected my relationship with my husband's family.

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29. HCV has impacted on my working life. I used to be a store manager, but I ended up having to pack in my job due to the stress and fatigue, and not knowing why I felt so tired. I had a foggy brain and when I was tired I couldn't string a sentence together. I became a cleaner instead for 16 hours per week. I was a single mother with six children, two of whom were still at home, and I was in severe debt. I ended up losing my house and my car. I was declared bankrupt. I got Working Tax Credit and managed to eventually work my way out of it.
30. In my last job they just did not understand at all. They did not make reasonable adjustments, if anything I was more of a thorn in their side. During that period of employment I went into hospital for my gall bladder operation. Even though I was in hospital they made me call in sick every day. They had a policy for employees on chemotherapy, yet even though my medication was along the same lines, with similar side effects they did not have a policy for me so I did not get the same treatment. I got questioned about whether I was up to the job. I left that job in July 2018.
31. I started a new job in October 2018 and am on probation for six months. I suffer badly from urticaria at work and itch badly. I cannot sleep at night for itching. Working takes it out of me, but I can barely afford not to work.
32. Financially, I feel HCV has deprived me of a career. I have chopped and changed jobs over the years. I used to be a store manager and could have



worked my way up if only I could have stayed in the same job, instead of having to change jobs and cut down my hours because of the fatigue. If I hadn't found my current job I would have been sacked from my last job because of my sickness record.

33. At times I have worked as a health care assistant. I find it extremely worrying that I could have infected others without my knowing.
34. Travel insurance is now a lot more expensive because of the infection. I have to declare my status when applying. Losing my car, my house and having been declared bankrupt means I have never been able to apply for a mortgage. I am only just beginning to rebuild my credit rating. If it wasn't for my husband I wouldn't have a car, and I have always had to have guarantors, even for renting homes.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

35. I did face difficulties in obtaining treatment. There was a delay in getting given the medication and the stress of not knowing if I was going to get it. When I Googled my liver results I knew I was 0.4 away from cirrhosis, so when you know you have to wait for medication, it is worrying. I had seen my partner go through a liver transplant so I knew what might be coming for me.
36. I had reached crisis point in the year before I was diagnosed, so was already receiving counselling at the time of diagnosis. The specialist nurse said counselling was available but because I was already on it, she said they wouldn't offer any, so there was no specialist counselling. Some sort of emotional support for my children would be helpful. They must look back at their childhood and have questions that they might want to talk about.

37. I have never been given another fibroid scan; I have never been offered any scans since the end of treatment, and now I have been discharged. The specialist nurse said I didn't need another one.
38. In terms of follow-up, I had a test after a year, which showed I was clear. I have no other follow-up tests which I think is totally wrong. I am told I am cured, but I don't know how my liver is. I don't know the risks to me going forward. I have my Barrett's oesophagus checked every two years, but this pre-dated the HCV diagnosis. I don't know what will happen to me in the future. I don't know what other illnesses could affect me. I have heard of people getting liver cancer.

### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

39. After my doctor gave me the diagnosis I Googled to find out more information and found there was possibly some financial assistance available. I found out a little bit about the Trusts and Funds and was prepared with this basic information when I went to see the specialist nurse. I asked her about it and had some downloaded forms ready and waiting. She would not sign them and said, 'find me the evidence and I will sign the form'. I didn't know what I had to find. I was back and forth to the doctors to find stuff. The doctors didn't know how to fill in the forms. The forms were sent back. I lost out on a year of payments because I couldn't get the evidence. I applied to the Skipton Fund, but it changed over to EIBSS, so that delayed it again.
40. I received the lump sum payment of £20,000 from EIBSS in February 2018 together with the Stage 1 payment of £300. I also received SCM (Special Category Mechanism) payments from July 2018. I tried for Stage 2 but I did not get that.
41. I faced considerable difficulties in trying to apply for financial assistance. The doctors' receptionist got very frustrated with me calling all the time; it took

months for the doctors to fill out the forms. In the end I took them into the surgery with me. The forms are difficult, and the GP did not know what to write. In the end he filled it out in front of me. I thought the specialist nurse should have been able to help with the forms.

42. I struggled to find the evidence for the blood transfusion. It was my GP who eventually found it in my GP records for me. If I had known I had HCV then I would have requested my records years ago. Two hospitals have told me they have both lost them, allegedly one in a fire. I find this hard to believe: surely there must be evidence of a fire available, even if it was a local newspaper report? The other hospital couldn't find any records and they say that they have since been destroyed. I am concerned why my medical records are incomplete. I have no hospital record at all, and only half my GP records.
43. From my own experience of the various Trusts and Funds, I believe that the payments should be from when I was contaminated, not from when I found out. It feels like they are waiting for people to find out on their own or to die to reduce the costs of paying out.
44. There is also the uncertainty of not knowing when the payments will stop. They can stop the money at any point and that would put a huge strain on us financially. They keep moving the goalposts. Whatever changes they make to the scheme I should be no worse off, it should be for life. I should not be spoon-fed: they should give me a lump sum, an income for life and an apology.
45. The lump sums should be reasonable. I do not believe £20,000 is enough. It's as if that is all you are worth. I need to know where I stand so that I can plan my life. There are other things I can apparently claim for, but I don't know anything about it. I hear things through Facebook or word of mouth. The information is buried. You are told to make a phone call if you are interested, but they do not tell you what they are offering. It is like having to beg. There should be an information pack and the forms should be simplified. There

should be help with finding the relevant evidence in your medical records. Instead I have had to pay to access my records and the onus is on me to do it all and find the information with no assistance from government bodies only indifference and obstruction.

46. It feels as though so little is thought of our lives that we are used to save money. In the long run it has not saved money.

### **Section 8. Other Issues**

47. I went to the opening ceremony in September 2018. I hope the Inquiry continues in the same spirit of openness. The frustration for me is whether I can get time off work to attend future hearings: I doubt that I can. I want to be able to attend and would want it to be treated as if I am on jury service from an employer's point of view. I will only have just finished my probation period at work when the next set of hearings start. I don't want to be forced to use my holiday to attend the hearings. After the last hearings, infected people were just wiped out: it had a big effect; it knocks you out for days. You need time to recover from something like that. I will feel angry if I have to use my holiday allowance to attend something so important.
48. I hope the Inquiry is conducted speedily but I don't want anything to be skipped over. One of the main campaigners has already died during the course of the Inquiry. I would like to witness what the core people involved in making these decisions have to say. If someone key is giving evidence and I am unable to attend that will affect my mental state.
49. I hope the Inquiry will achieve closure. I hope it will educate, and encourage people who have not been tested yet to go out and get tested before it is too late. I hope it will raise public awareness and reduce the ignorance around this disease.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 12 February 2019