

Witness Name: D Dennis  
Statement No: WITN2726001  
Exhibits: 0  
Dated: November 2018

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DEBRA DENNIS

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I, Debra Dennis will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Debra Dennis. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958. I live at GRO-C  
GRO-C with my husband Barrie. I am currently employed as an Ophthalmic Nurse Specialist at Warwick Hospital.
2. Barrie has given a separate Witness Statement to the Inquiry (WITN1185001).

#### Section 2: How Affected

3. Barrie suffers from mild/moderate Haemophilia B meaning that he has a Factor IX deficiency. I understand that he was given Factor IX concentrate between 1977 and 1989.
4. As a result of receiving infected blood products Barrie contracted Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

5. In the late 1980s Barrie was told by Professor Lee at the Royal Free Haemophilia Centre that he had Hepatitis B. A few weeks later he came home from a clinic appointment at the hospital and told me that he had been diagnosed with Hepatitis C.
6. At that time I was working as a nursing sister at St Mark's Hospital. I knew immediately that I would have to be tested for Hepatitis C. Although Hepatitis C had only just been identified when Barrie was given his diagnosis the virus that caused it (previously known as non A non B hepatitis) had been around for some time and I had some knowledge of it through my work in the NHS.
7. I went to see my line manager immediately afterwards and he sent me to Occupational Health. I was told that I could no longer work in A&E or surgery.
8. Barrie was not given any information about the infection and certainly did not receive any written guidance about routes of transmission when he was diagnosed. His diagnosis was very much played down as nothing to worry about with the good news being that he no longer had Hepatitis B.
9. I also remember that the Haemophilia Society only seemed to send through any information after things had been talked about in the press rather than when they were aware of issues arising. This was particularly true when it came to the risk of vCJD.

**Section 3: Other Infections**

10. Barrie was definitely exposed to Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C because he contracted both infections.
11. He was tested for HIV which means that the doctors thought he might have been exposed to this. Luckily he tested negative.
12. He has also been told that he is "at risk" of vCJD.

**Section 4: Consent**

13. I believe Barrie was tested without his consent for HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

14. GRO-C  
GRO-C

15. I was tested for Hepatitis C regularly following Barrie's diagnosis. This was done with my consent. I cannot recall whether I was tested for HIV but if I was it was done with my consent.

**Section 5: Impact**

16. Barrie and I were trying to conceive GRO-C in 1986-1987, a time when Barrie had likely be diagnosed with Hepatitis B and C but not yet informed of his diagnosis. We are therefore fortunate that our child was not born with Hepatitis. I am extremely angry that we were never given that information and the ability to make a choice regarding our son's health.

17. At the time of Barrie's diagnosis I was employed at St Mark's Hospital as a nursing sister. I was already tested every year for Hepatitis B but following Barrie's diagnosis I also had to be tested yearly for Hepatitis C.

18. I felt that there was a stigma because my line manager was aware and it restricted the areas of the hospital that I was allowed to work in.

19. Barrie underwent treatment for his Hepatitis C in the late 2000s. He was treated with Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. There were side effects which included flu like symptoms, dizziness and depression.

20. Barrie has polyarthritis in both hands as a result of his Hepatitis C infection. He has chronic lung disease and bronchiectasis. This means is susceptible to respiratory infections and he now has an almost permanent cough. He is

more prone to all forms of cancer and has had several skin lumps/lesions removed which have been cancerous.

21. He has also had a number of kidney infections and UTIs and has been admitted to hospital with constipation.

22. Barrie had bowel cancer in 2005 and a liver transplant in 2013. The full details of his treatment are set out in his Statement.

23. Following the transplant he went into renal failure in ITU. He had an internal bleed and nearly died. I remember being called at 4 am to say that he had had to be rushed back in to surgery. He had to have dialysis for a few weeks before his renal function improved.

24. When Barrie came out of the QEH following his liver transplant he was discharged with a wound bag which I thought I could change. However it turned out he contracted *C.diff* whilst in hospital and whilst he was at home his wound bag burst. A friend of mine who was a district nurse came round to help hose Barrie down and I called for an ambulance. I was told that they have to send out a first responder which was pointless because I knew Barrie needed an ambulance. When the ambulance came I was told it was protocol to take a patient to the nearest hospital. This meant that Barrie had to be taken to Warwick Hospital even though he had been discharged from the QEH and we knew he would need to go back there. It was New Year's Eve and Barrie spent 4 ½ hours in Warwick A&E before he was transferred to the QEH. When he arrived at the QEH he spent another 3 hours in A&E before he was allocated a bed. It was horrendous.

25. Last year Barrie was treated with the new anti viral drug, Epclusa. I took his prescription to the hospital pharmacy to be filled. The pharmacist on duty said "you never know what sort of person is getting this, whether they are drug addicts..." I pointed out that the prescription was in the name of Mr Dennis which embarrassed my colleague but is just one example of the stigma that is still attached to having Hepatitis C. I expected more from someone working in the medical profession.

26. I cannot sew and Barrie used to do all the sewing in our house. However, he now cannot do this because of the polyarthritis in his hands. He also finds it difficult to get dressed because he cannot do up his belt or buttons and he struggles to open jars etc which makes cooking difficult.
27. I know that he is also frustrated that he cannot do any DIY or fix practical things that go wrong.
28. Barrie's personality has changed over the years as a result of his infection, the treatments and the medical complications. We have been together 36 years and there are days when he is very difficult to live with. It is exhausting living with someone who is ill all the time. When I come in from work I pray before I open the door that it will have been one of his better days and I won't just hear about how ill he has felt that day. His constant moaning makes me feel very down.
29. I still work and now also have to do an increasing amount around the house because Barrie cannot manage simple tasks. It is very frustrating for him and sometimes I come home from work to find he has thrown jars across the kitchen in frustration after he hasn't been able to open them.
30. The financial impact of Barrie's illness on our lives has been significant. He effectively became a house husband following his diagnosis. I was determined that the children would not miss out and in the end I got to the point where I was taking out a new credit card to pay off an old credit card, I also took out bank loans and we ended up about £50,000 in debt. Barrie didn't have any idea how bad it was because I didn't want him to know. Eventually I went to the Citizen's Advice Bureau for help and they put me in touch with Payplan (a debt management company) who were brilliant.
31. I worked 60 hour weeks and didn't take holiday but managed to pay off £46,000 in 10 years. The debt was only cleared about 18 months ago.
32. Then in January this year I was told that the NHS had overpaid me by £21,000 over 3 years and wanted the money back. I was devastated. In the

end they could only legally require me to pay back £7,000 which was a huge relief.

33. The family missed out on holidays to see Barrie's family in Italy because we could not afford to go. We always had the excuse that I was working or that Barrie was ill but it was difficult.

34. At times we have been made to feel a real burden on the system. Barrie's current medication is very expensive and the various medical teams involved in his care have repeatedly argued about which budget the funding should come from. The GP said the hospitals should pay; Warwick Hospital felt the QEH should pay and the QEH felt the GP should pay. I feel embarrassed now when Barrie goes in for a medication review because I know it is costing the NHS thousands of pounds and we have been reminded of this on several occasions.

35. It is impossible for me to attend all of Barrie's medical appointments with him because there are so many of them. To attend all the appointments I would have to stop working.

36. Our family are very supportive but the children have missed out because of Barrie's illness. He wasn't able to attend our son's graduation because he was ill and I know that he still struggles with having missed out on that day. We have two granddaughters and although our daughter in law is very good there are times when she doesn't want to bring the girls over to see us because Barrie has a respiratory infection and she is worried the girls will catch it.

37. We recently went to New York with family for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Barrie wasn't able to keep up with walking around the city because of his respiratory problems so we often left him sitting on a bench and picked him up on the way back.

38. Over the years I have written to a number of law firms about the contaminated blood scandal. When it was in the media I wrote to a number of human rights and/or medical negligence firms but was turned away. I spoke to someone at

the Times who was interested in the story but wanted hard evidence of the cover up. I wanted someone to listen to the emotional side of the story and hear the impact that it had had on our lives. He only wanted the names of those we thought were responsible. It was then that I contacted our MP.

39. Our local MP, Nadim Zahawli, has been a great support. He referred us to the Caxton Trust. He also found out from other MPs that they had constituents who had been affected and managed to get the issue mentioned in Parliament.

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

40. Barrie's treatment at the QEH and Warwick Hospital has been very good. His doctors have fought hard for his treatments, particularly the liver transplant.

41. I have not been offered any counselling and I know that Barrie does not find counselling helpful.

### **Section 7: Financial Assistance**

42. The Caxton Trust helped with travel expenses to Barrie's medical appointments but would not help with our debt management.

43. Over the years they became more difficult to deal with and after we received a grant to make the bathroom accessible for Barrie the next set of travel expenses we submitted were refused.

44. I hate asking Caxton for anything because it felt like begging.

### **Section 8: Other Issues**

45. I work for the NHS and have done since the 1970s. I am passionate about the NHS but I feel the tragedy of this scandal has been compounded by the secrecy around it which has gone on for 40 years.

46. With the individuals who have been infected you can see what the affect of this scandal is more easily. For those of us who have been affected it is more difficult to see the impact. This experience has changed me. It changed my children.

**Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

47. I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

48. I would like to be called to give oral evidence at the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed..... GRO-C.....

Dated 26.11.18