

Witness Name: Steven Phillip Thornton

Statement No: WITN2806001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: August 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF STEVEN PHILLIP THORNTON

I, Stephen Phillip Thornton, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Stephen Phillip Thornton of GRO-C
GRO-C I was born on GRO-C 1951 and I am 67 years old. I am currently working, married and live with my wife. I also have two daughters who do not live with me.
2. I was infected with Hepatitis C as a result of receiving contaminated blood. I have since cleared myself of this virus, though I still carry the antibodies in my blood today.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records.

Section 2. How infected

4. I suffer from mild Haemophilia A. I believe I was diagnosed in 1956 when I was around five years old after having suffered some bruising. Thereafter I

was admitted to Welburn Hall School in Yorkshire, a school for children with special needs. I was informed that I would be unable to participate in sporting activities. Against this, Welburn allowed me to play football in my playtime which I loved doing. I never had to go to the hospital for my bleeds, but when I did I initially received cryoprecipitate then Factor VIII concentrate. I am not aware whether my parents were informed that the hospital intended on changing my treatment.

5. I was treated at the Hull Royal Infirmary as a child. Thereafter I was treated at St James Hospital in Leeds and I believe it was there that I was infected. I was in intensive care due to an accident I had experienced when I was fourteen and I believe I was treated with Cryoprecipitate. After that, between the years 1972 to 1974, when I was 22 to 24, I was admitted at York County Hospital again as I had woken up with a massive headache and I was vomiting and urinating blood. At that time, they nearly gave me the wrong blood products. A nurse had given me a blood bag and a few minutes later I heard the sister ask her if she had seen another patient's blood. The nurse immediately rushed over to me and removed that blood bag. I think it was the sister who gave me the injection which made me urinate in order to clean my blood of any of the wrong blood they had given me. That is why I had 10 to 15 bottles around my bed.
6. My dental treatment was carried out at St James Hospital in Leeds and I recall receiving Factor VIII during some procedures.
7. In 1988, I went to York Hospital for a blood test as I was a diabetic. They found an abnormality in my blood and wanted to repeat the test so I did. I was then diagnosed with Non A Non B Hepatitis by Dr Howard. I did not know what that was and prior to my diagnosis, nothing had been unusual with my health. All the media attention at the time was on HIV and AIDS so I had only heard of those viruses. I was asked if I wanted an AIDS test, but I refused as at that point it had been ten years since my last blood transfusion. If I had AIDS the symptoms would have kicked in by now.

8. At the meeting with Dr Howard, he discussed drinking and how to practice safe sex, I was also given a letter containing information and advice about Hepatitis C. I was then referred to Dr Turnable, a liver specialist who kept an eye on me. I attended the hospital regularly, but not once was it mentioned that I had contracted this virus as a result of having received contaminated blood. I learned that the cause was the Factor VIII treatment through my sister who had read an article in a newspaper some time in the later 1990's.

Section 3. Other Infections

9. I received a letter in the post from the hospital stating that I may have CJD. Luckily I tested negative for this.

Section 4. Consent

10. I had regular blood tests due to my Haemophilia and my diabetic status, so I did not think anything of it. I did not know that the blood they had taken was going to be tested for Hepatitis C and therefore I believe that I was tested without my knowledge, without my consent and without being given full or adequate information.
11. I could have been tested for research purposes as I now question why I was always having blood tests.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

12. Finding out that I had Hepatitis C through no fault of my own was difficult to absorb. I felt violated, dirty and very depressed. I suffered from awful mood swings and for a period of time I had to take time off work due to depression. I felt extremely lonely and like I was out there on my own. Everyone I knew associated Hepatitis C with drugs or homosexuality and I had never experienced either, but how was I to going to explain that to people at a time when nobody knew that the blood products I had been receiving were contaminated? The stigma attached to HIV and Hepatitis C was so severe

and there was no hiding from it, but I was adamant to not let this affect me forever.

13. I told my workplace and colleagues that I had Hepatitis C not long after I was diagnosed, but they were fully accepting and supportive. This meant a great deal to me as I would have been really hurt if they treated me differently

14. Before my diagnosis I had been in a relationship with my second partner for ten years. [GRO-D]
[GRO-D]
[GRO-D] After my diagnosis the relationship broke down [GRO-D]
[GRO-D] It was a very difficult time for me given that I had just been told I had Hepatitis C.

15. I was offered Interferon in 2001 which my current wife administered to me at our home. I had the first course for a total of twelve months. I did not notice how the medication was affecting me mentally until a few months into the treatment. My mood would fluctuate and I would often get very angry at people, sometimes at my wife. I would have to apologise to people for reacting irrationally. When I went on the Interferon, I was not able to concentrate at work and started thinking all sorts of things. I also felt extremely fatigued, lost my appetite and lost a lot of weight. In particular I had terrible itching and because of the impact the drug had on me mentally, I would blame our cat for carrying fleas. Unfortunately, the first course of Interferon failed. This left me feeling very depressed as I had gone through twelve months of hell for no reason.

16. In 2003, I started a second course of Interferon coupled with Ribavirin. Prior to starting this course of treatment, I recall having a conversation with Dr Howard who seemed to believe that it would not be beneficial to me as there was only a 1% chance of success. I insisted on having the treatment as for me, 1% was better than nothing. I had to pick up the treatment from St James Hospital in Leeds for which I paid around £28 per month. I asked other patients if they had to pay to which most answered no. I cannot understand

why I had to pay for treatment for an infection which I only had because of their mistake. At the very least, they could have given me the treatment on prescription and made it available at my local pharmacy. I asked why I had to pay for my drugs as it was no fault of my own. In response, they said if I was to get it delivered to my house I wouldn't have to pay for them. So I then got them delivered to my house. The treatment was successful and cleared my body of the infection. I still get my blood tested regularly just to be on the safe side.

17. The Hepatitis C caused me to get cirrhosis of the liver and the medical staff wanted to blame it on alcohol. I was never a heavy drinker. The doctor advised me that I could consume two pints a week and even then I never drank at all. On one liver screening I was told by the doctor that I had the liver of an alcoholic and the nurse noted this in her report. That was simply not true as I knew how much alcohol I had consumed. As a result of my liver disease, I had to have a camera down my throat every three months and constantly need to go for annual liver check up

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

18. I never received any counselling or psychological support in consequence of what happened. I believe it would have been beneficial as I would have had someone to talk to about it.

19. As I have mentioned, I struggled to get on the second course of treatment for my Hepatitis C. I sometimes think that had I not insisted, I may not be here today.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

20. I received a total of £50,000 from the Skipton Fund. In 2002 I received a Stage 1 payment of £20,000 and I later received a Stage 2 payment of £25,000, but I cannot recall when this was. I also received £1200 per month which has now increased to £1500 per month. The application was fairly

straightforward, but it required my doctor's assistance to confirm my diagnosis which did take some time.

Section 8. Other Issues

21. Insurance companies classified me as high risk and therefore obtaining life insurance was impossible. I would and still have to pay a high premium on travel insurance as a result of being infected. I was also unable to get a mortgage. After getting married to my current wife we would have had to take out a mortgage in her sole name.

22. I am a member of the Haemophilia Society and of the Tainted Blood Group. Both have been helpful and made me realise that I was not on my own. I occasionally post on the Facebook groups venting out my anger. The government's plot to conceal such a massive operation is shocking. It felt like a plot against haemophiliacs and I would like to see some justice for all of us.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

23. I confirm that I do not wish to remain anonymous. I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

24. I do not wish to provide oral evidence to the inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed: GRO-C

Dated *13/8/19.*