

Witness Name: Martin Thornton

Statement No: WITN 2949001

Exhibits:

Dated: April 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARTIN THORNTON

I, Martin Thornton will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Martin Thornton and I live at, GRO-C  
GRO-C Spain. I was born on GRO-C 1947. I am retired and have been since 2006 after suffering with ill health. I moved to Spain 10 years ago and into this particular house in 2013. I live with my wife and we have a son who is aged 41.
2. I am providing this statement to the Inquiry on behalf of my late friend and business partner, Thomas Reginald Pexton. I am the executor of his estate.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to Thomas's medical records.

#### Section 2. How Affected

4. Thomas and I were business partners for over 20 years. Thomas had severe Haemophilia A and from the very start of our relationship I always knew this

and we always managed to work around everything. I knew Thomas from 1971 until his death in 1996.

5. I was a plumber in those days and I did a lot of building restoration in our company and Thomas was a new electrician that had joined. Our friendship grew from there really and we set up our own business. We travelled around the country building laundrettes and dry cleaning shops which were the booming industries at that time. Eventually we bought premises of our own, rented another and registered a partnership called '*Dry cleaning Wells*'. This consisted of 2 dry cleaning shops and we ran them for around 30 years. Thomas did not want to be behind the counter so he went off doing electrical works such as TV repairs.
6. I do not know much about how Thomas was infected. He was very secretive about some things and he would not be so open all the time.
7. He was however infected with Hepatitis C. He was given blood products for his Haemophilia and he was having bleeds that would come in waves. He would therefore be in and out of hospital. I do not know what products he was given as he did not really discuss this with me.
8. I am not aware of when Thomas found out that he had been infected. We were very close but he did used to disappear for several weeks without a word and he was very secretive when he wanted to be. I remember his expression was always '*oh I have just been to Bognor and back*'. It meant that what he had been doing was private and I just accepted it.
9. Thomas never specifically told me about his infection but I knew about it when his health started to deteriorate. Then one day he told me that he is not going to survive.
10. He never told me or anyone else of being told about any risks in taking these blood products. I do not know if Thomas was given adequate information to

manage his infection, nor am I aware if he believed the information about his infection should have been provided to him earlier.

11. To my knowledge, Thomas was treated in Kingston General Hospital when he was younger, before transferring to Hull Royal Infirmary Haemophilia Centre where he was under the care of Dr Chris Valentine. I believe this is where he was infected. After this he had treatment at Sheffield Hospital but this was after he was infected.

12. Thomas passed away on 9 July 1997, aged 46.

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

13. I am not aware of having any other infections.

### **Section 4. Consent**

14. I do not know if Thomas was ever tested or treated without his consent.

15. I am aware that he used to have a book where he would keep a meticulous record of every tablet or anything that he would take. He used to do this and cross reference them with doctors to make sure certain tablets were allowed to be taken with others. He never spoke to me about what he was or was not taking.

### **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

16. Thomas was very angry about what happened to him. While he was not a particularly physically strong man, he was extremely mentally strong and able to just get on with life and never asked for help.

17. Thomas told me several times that his favourite time of day was the first few moments when he woke up before the thoughts and worries over his condition

had entered into his mind. He would say that those were the precious seconds that he cherished everyday.

18. The first time I realised that something serious was happening to Thomas was after I had called round to his house and I saw that he had things all over the place. Thomas's house was a typical bachelor pad and it only had the necessities. I asked what he was doing and he told me that he was preparing for the future and going through all his things. It seemed to me that he had accepted that he was going to die and he was preparing himself. This would have been in 1996 about a year before he died.
19. Soon after meeting Thomas it became apparent that he was not a normal person. On one occasion when we were working together he was so secretive. He was struggling with something so when I asked if he was okay he made up an excuse about his elbow and it was later I found out that he had Haemophilia. It then made sense to me the reason why he was having pain in his elbow which caused him to struggle. I helped him with what he was struggling with. However it did worry me at the time because our work was risky and I occasionally wondered what we would do if there was an accident.
20. Thomas was such a proud and independent man. Sometimes when we were eating at work or in a restaurant I used to have to help cut his food up because he struggled with pains in his elbows and joints.
21. I knew what was going on and had a good idea when things were happening with him. This almost became like an unspoken thing between us. We both knew what was going on but we had a mutual respect for each other and an understanding so we didn't really talk about it. I am sure that Thomas preferred it that way. I was of the opinion that If he wanted to tell me something he would and when he was ready.
22. Sometimes Thomas was just too ill to work but I accepted that. He was my colleague and my friend. He could not do heavy lifting and sometimes he could not even drive as his elbow was so bad. This happened on and off

when we were working together. Occasionally the problems were more serious than the previous week if he had had a particularly bad bleed for example.

23. Thomas would telephone me if he had a bad bleed and I would go and take him to the hospital and would stay with him. I never saw him take any medication or anything though.

24. In mid 1996 Thomas was able to work less and less and by the time I went on holiday in early 1997 he was virtually bed ridden. He told people that if he died while we were away then they should buy a freezer and leave him in it as I would sort it all out when I got back.

25. He was bed ridden at home from then on and would not go out unless absolutely required. He had no one to help him apart from 2 lovely nurses that used to come and spend time with him, sitting through the night with us. There were also a couple of close friends that he would allow in. I was still running the business at this time.

26. I was always going to do my best by Thomas and have always tried to do so. I slept nights at his house if he needed me and if he shouted for me that he needed me then I would be there. We would occasionally take days off and spend time with each other.

27. Thomas never wanted people to see him ill nor did he want people to know of his illness. It affected him and he was a proud man.

28. Some people began to suspect things due to his deteriorating condition and his liver failure.

29. Later, the stigma surrounding HIV and Hepatitis had started to die down and it was becoming slightly more talked about in society. There was a big report about the Terrence Higgins Trust and I remember Thomas had made quite a

few donations to them. It made me think that Thomas had HIV. As the Trust had always seemed to be close to his heart.

30. Thomas was very savvy and always knew what was happening and what should have been happening in regards to his treatment and care. He was on top of things.
31. He was always happy with his treatment and he could not help but sing the praises of his hospitals. If he was not happy with something then they would definitely know about it and of course so would I. He had his own room in hospital and they really could not have done more for him.
32. Thomas would always go into BUPA Hospital in Annleby on the outskirts of Hull for treatment for any complications. Dr Valentine would go there to see him too. He would not have been infected there though as this was towards the end of his life.
33. I am sure Thomas's infection would have been devastating for him and would have had a massive impact on his family and social life but he would just not let people on to this. He always worked around it but I noticed his group of friends became smaller and smaller. In the end there were only 2 people that he would always see.
34. Thomas was involved in an amateur dramatic class but suddenly just stopped it too.
35. No one had any idea that he was ill. His uncle would phone and Thomas would say that he was busy and so he did not even tell his family.
36. Thomas loved flying and had been flying for a few years and had bought a helicopter. His condition had stopped him flying. His last wish was to leave his helicopter in an airfield in York and the day before he died he was granted permission. He was so elated even though he knew he would not live for it to fly again. He loved that helicopter.

37. Thomas got to a point quite rapidly where he needed permanent hospital care, however he did not want his neighbours to see him in a weakened state. He would make me park my car in his garage and then he would get in and we would leave from there to the hospital. Thomas was always very careful about the stigma surrounding his illness.
38. Losing Thomas has had a massive impact on me and it is difficult to put into words. It had such a huge impact on our lives while he was alive and were always happy to help him. Of course I am devastated and seeing him die was not pleasant however it was so much worse for him. He was the one suffering and in so much pain. His life transformed and he went through such an elongated process of deterioration.
39. On Thomas's death certificate the cause of death doesn't state HIV. Thomas was always very careful about touching people and the risk of infection. I cannot actually say whether or not he had HIV for certain.
40. One of the hardest things I had to do was to finalise the estate in my role as executor of the estate. We had to get rid of his helicopter and watching it fly off without Thomas inside was very hard to deal with. He loved it so much, he even took me and my wife on a flight, and he was very generous with his time.
41. Dealing with Thomas's estate had a terrible effect on me. Trying to deal with everyone's questions about what had happened to him and making sure not to tell anyone his secret. People used to think it was just me being secretive but Thomas did not want people to know and so I continued to respect his wishes.
42. In terms of Thomas's estate the business became mine and my wife's. The rest of Thomas's estate was given to us and 3 other friends as he did not have any family. He had been married but they parted many years before.

### **Section 6. Treatment/care/support**

43. No counselling or any support or anything. He was such a strong personality and was very knowledgeable.

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

44. When Thomas was alive he received £25,000 from the Government just before he died. I believe it was something to do with the treatment drugs he was taking but I am not entirely certain who paid it out or the reasons why.

45. I believe Thomas also received Employment Support Allowance for a period of time before he died.

46. In 2011, in Sheffield, we were trying to get information in order to apply to the Skipton Fund post Thomas's death. I had sent Dr Valentine a letter and he mentioned it to Dr Makris. It was at that point Dr Makris applied to the Skipton fund on our behalf.

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

47. Thomas's condition went on for so many years and he was a very close friend. I was closer to him than I was to my brother and so seeing him deteriorate and suffer in the way that he did was very hard to watch, especially since it was through no fault of his own. He was a Hemophiliac and was infected from something that was supposed to help treat him. Nobody should have to die like that and in that much pain through something that was no even their fault.

48. I want something to come from this Inquiry to ensure that nothing like that can ever happen again. There should be more checks and balances in the system. It should not be money orientated which is seems to me that it was. In order to save a little bit of money thousands of people have had their lives turned upside down. This should not have happened.



**Anonymity**

49. I do not wish to remain anonymous.

50. I do not want to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

**Statement of Truth**

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

GRO-C

Signed.....

Dated 26/04/2019