Witness Name: Pushpa Gurung
Statement No.: WITN1891001
Exhibits: WITN1891002 –
WITN1891006
Dated: 7 March 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PUSHPA GURUNG

Section 1. Introduction

1. I, Pushpa Gurung, will say as follows: -

2. My date of birth is GRO-C 1955. My address is known to the Inquiry.

3. I live with my husband and daughter in Hong Kong. My husband and I are both retired. My husband used to be a soldier in the British Army and was stationed in Hong Kong garrison from 1974 to 1989.

Section 2. How Infected

4. On GRO-C 1987 I delivered my daughter by caesarean section at the British Military Hospital in Hong Kong. The hospital was operated by the UK Ministry of Defence and was established exclusively for Gurkha personnel who were serving at the British garrison in Hong Kong. At that time Hong Kong was a

British colony and, though there were many local hospitals run by the Hong Kong government, all Gurkhas and their dependents were not allowed to access treatment in local hospitals. We lived in one of the 12 army camps on the island.

5. On the third day after delivery, due to low haemoglobin levels of 6.5, I was given a blood transfusion (WITN1891002). After the transfusion my haemoglobin level rose to 10.4.

6. The British Military Hospital closed in 1995, two years before the British government handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997. The army camps closed and, following the handover, all British and Gurkha soldiers and their dependents left Hong Kong, mostly for Nepal, Brunei or the UK to continue their service in the British Army. I remained in Hong Kong. Before I left the garrison quarter, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) handed all my medical records to me, which I still have today.

7. I received no information or advice before the transfusion about the risk of being exposed to infection.

8. As a result of being given infected blood I was infected with Hepatitis C ('HCV').

9. On the morning of 16 January 2004 I got up and experienced a dizzy spell. I sat back down and after a few moments felt fine. I didn't pay much attention to it and went to work. The next morning the same thing happened. Straight away I went to see the doctor in the nearest hospital, Pok Oi Hospital. A blood test was taken for kidneys, heart and liver. Whilst waiting for the results of the test I continued to feel unwell. One day I felt so lethargic I slept for nearly 20 hours and sometimes I felt nauseous and vomited.

10. On 27 January I received a call from the hospital asking for a blood test for liver function tests. On 4 February the hospital confirmed I tested positive for Anti-HCV. I was referred to Tuen Mun Hospital for Anti-HCV confirmation. On 16 February Tuen Mun Hospital confirmed I was infected with HCV genotype 1b. I had never heard of HCV before I was diagnosed and I knew no one with the disease so when the hospital confirmed I was infected with HCV I knew nothing about it. I had very little information about it from the hospital so I started to Google the disease and learned a lot. I travelled to India for a second opinion and the result was also positive. On 20 November 2006 I had a cholecystectomy at Tuen Mun Hospital and a liver biopsy was done at the same time. The biopsy showed chronic hepatitis grade 1 stage 3, consistent with HCV. I was referred to the Princess Margaret Hospital for treatment (WITN1891003).

11. At the Princess Margaret Hospital a social worker explained in detail about HCV, the signs and symptoms, how to take precautions, and the treatment available at that time to both me and my husband. The social worker also explained the side effects of treatment and gave us her contact number case of emergency. During subsequent treatment she called me once a week. I feel I was given adequate information to help me understand and manage the infection, but this was not until 2006, and I would have preferred to have been given this information as soon as I was diagnosed in 2004.

12. I was given information about the risks to others and was instructed not to share needles, razors, toothbrushes or any blades, etc with others. GRO-C

GRO-C

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I do not believe I have received any infection other than HCV.

Section 4. Consent

14. I do not believe I have been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

15. The diagnosis had a great impact on me. I felt very low and no longer smiled. I had no desire to do anything and would lock myself in my room for hours on end. I frequently cried myself to sleep. I asked God why he had chosen me? Why was I infected? What had I done wrong in my past life? The only thought in my mind was that I was going to die soon. I worried what would become of my family.

16. I learnt through online research that the only treatment available was Interferon and Ribavirin. I was told I would have 48 weeks of treatment. The side effects were dreadful and I suffered with fatigue, lethargy, brain fog, forgetfulness, weight loss, flu like symptoms, hair loss, loss of taste, itching (I had scratches all over my body), cold and fever, mood swings, bleeding gums and muscle cramps. I have since lost teeth and am still doing so.

17. My treatment was declared to have 'failed' and, since there weren't any other treatment options, the hospital did not suggest or even ask about my interest in opting for further treatment (WITN1891004).

18. Although there were no difficulties in accessing treatment, I suffered long delays in getting to see doctors and, when I did have an appointment, I always saw someone different and they only spent a very short time with me.

19. I now have ultrasound and liver function tests twice a year and am borderline cirrhotic.

20. The impact on my relationship with my husband has been very difficult. My husband and I kept the disease between ourselves for a very long time. I was very scared to have any physical relationship with him as I understood that physical contact might result in him becoming infected. GRO-C

GRO-C

21. My daughter lives with us and the three of us live in fear of my check-up appointments. We have all experienced sleepless nights for many years.

22. When I was first diagnosed I told no one about the disease. I found it very difficult to talk to my family about it. When I started treatment I was so unwell that my family had to tell my close relatives what was happening. I continue to find it very difficult to talk to people about the disease. Later on I managed to tell a close relative, but that was the only person I shared it with.

23. I slowly stopped attending all social gatherings with relatives and friends. We now try to avoid social gatherings and I no longer have a social life. In our culture and society people still believe the virus transmits through physical relationships. There was a question mark over my character as a result.

24. When my treatment was confirmed I couldn't face the idea of continuing to work because I had read about the likely side effects of Interferon and Ribavirin. I was too scared to continue working, so I left my job to prepare for the 48 weeks of treatment. Before my diagnosis both my husband and I had full time jobs. Once I left work when I started treatment it was only my husband who was able to work. Later, he too had to give up work so he could be with me 24 hours a day. We lived in rented accommodation and our daughter was at college. We had to survive on our savings and our existence was miserable.

25. Nowadays my daughter is a teaching assistant and helps us financially with all of our day to day expenses. My husband draws his pension every month from the Ministry of Defence in the UK.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

26. In Hong Kong there was no care and support for patients with HCV. There was no support group and no one to share my experiences with. I was completely on my own.

27. Before I started my treatment I met with the hospital social worker who explained everything to me, including the infection, treatment, side effects and how to prevent others becoming infected. Apart from this conversation, there was no other support, counselling or psychological help.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

28. I only found out about financial assistance when I told a solicitor in the UK what had happened to me. The Caxton Fund then wrote to me asking for medical evidence of the transfusion, which I provided. I then received the Stage 1 payment of £20,000 in September 2009. In September 2016 I received the Stage 2 payment and quarterly payments.

29. The process of applying for the Stage 1 payment was straight forward, once I had provided the evidence which I had in my medical records. The process for Stage 2 was much more difficult: it was complicated, time consuming and expensive. They provided me with a set of documents and I had to ask my treating doctor to complete, sign and stamp the forms (WITN1891005). I had to pay £100 (sterling) to my doctor to complete the forms (WITN1891006) and it took nearly 40 days before they were ready for collection. I then had to register the documents in the UK which cost £5. I was initially turned down for

the Stage 2 payment as they said I could not meet their requirements, however this was subsequently granted in September 2016 and I now received Stage 2 payments.

Section 8. Other Issues

30. I hope the Inquiry will achieve justice by holding those responsible to account. I would like there to be equal compensation for those infected and affected, regardless of whether the infection is HCV or HIV.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 7 March 2019