Witness Name: Maureen Harrison
Statement No.: WITN1896001
Exhibits: WITN1896002-
WITN1896003
Dated: 11 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MAUREEN HARRISON

Section 1. Introduction

I, Maureen Teresa Harrison, will say as follows: -

1. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry.

Section 2. How Infected

2. I was infected with Hepatitis C ('HCV') on 30th January 1978 at St. Mary's Maternity Hospital, Rugby, Warwickshire.

3. My second baby, a girl, was born on GRO-C 1978 and I was informed by a midwife after the birth that I was anaemic (low in iron). The midwife told me that I could stay in hospital and have a transfusion of two units of blood. She said that the alternative would be to take six months of iron tablets. She

advised that it would be better to stay overnight and have the transfusion, so I agreed to have the transfusion of blood.

4. My haemoglobin levels were 8.9 and I was transfused with two units of blood. The batch numbers were 78/01/02922 and 78/01/00740 (WITN1896002). No information or advice was given to me before the transfusion about the risk of being exposed to any infection.

5. As a result of being given the blood transfusion I was infected with HCV. I found out I was infected with HCV in 2007. This was the first time I discovered the infection and in the intervening 28 years I had given birth to my third child in 1988 and my fourth child in 1992.

6. I found out about my infection as follows. My marriage had ended and my ex-husband had left. My mum and dad came to see me and they had a copy of the Daily Mail. It was February 2007 and the front page story was of Dame GRO-A who been diagnosed with HCV in 2004 after having received an infected blood transfusion when she gave birth to her daughter in 1971. I read the story and I just knew I also had the infection.

7. I had already been to see my GP in 2006, the year before, as I knew something was wrong but I did not know what. I thought I might have cancer. The first GP I saw said, 'you've just got the menopause – get over it'. The second GP laughed but said he would send me for a general blood test just to check. This was in late 2006. The GP only requested a general blood test but I ticked the other items. The blood test results came back with a high reading and the GP wrote to the consultant. The results of further tests came back with a high reading for my liver results and I was diagnosed with HCV in March 2007.

8. No one told me the blood transfusion caused the HCV. I had to find out for myself. I had to pay £50 for my hospital records and £50 for my GP records. I had to search through the records to find evidence of the blood transfusion. Some of the information from the records was missing.

9. The GP referred me to the consultant, Dr. Drake, in April 2007. I saw Dr Drake and a specialist clinical nurse who talked to me about treatment. The liver biopsy showed Chronic Hepatitis associated with HCV infection Grade 1, Stage 1. I was to receive treatment for 24 weeks with Pegylated Interferon 100mcg weekly and Ribavirin 1 gram daily. I was very keen to get rid of the infection as quickly as possible.

10. The consultant and specialist nurse provided me with information about the virus but it was not discussed in any depth. The information I was given to help me understand and manage the infection was ok, but I became very depressed and just wanted to get rid of it. They didn't seem to understand the long term effects of being infected with HCV.

11. I received some information about the risks of others being infected as a result of the infection but I cannot remember the details.

Section 3. Other Infections

12. I do not believe I have received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

13. I believe I was not given adequate or full information about the risks of the blood transfusion I received in 1978.

Section 5. Impact

14. The impact of the infection before diagnosis was as follows. When my third child, a girl, was born on GRO-C 1988 she was breastfed. In May/June following the birth I felt so ill that I could not get up from bed, and I was aching and sweating. A doctor came to the house and said that it was 'flu'. No one

else I knew had flu and I was ill for two weeks. There is no mention of this in my medical records and I don't know why. My ex-husband would be able to confirm that the home visit took place. I believe that this was a HCV symptom rather than normal flu.

15. My fourth child, a boy, was born on GRO-C 1992. The Sharoe Green Hospital contacted me at 30 weeks during my pregnancy to say my blood had changed and they would be monitoring it. When I asked what this meant, their reply was that it was some kind of virus which changed the blood. The new blood group was now Rh Factor Pos Anti-C. The Serum Anti C was still raised at 32 weeks and by 36 weeks I was told the baby needed to be delivered. My son was in an incubator for a week after birth and he suffered with GRO-C GRO-C other problems for the next year. The consultant advised me not to have any more children as the Serum Anti C would interfere earlier and this would kill the baby. The only explanation I received about this change in my blood was that it was a virus. I do not know whether this was linked to the HCV.

16. Over the 28 years when I was undiagnosed I suffered with many health problems, including depression, aches and pains, headaches and regular insomnia. The worst symptom for me was the depression. I thought it was my fault, but I now believe these symptoms resulted from the infection. I was always going back and forth to my GP. I received counselling.

17. I was offered Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. That was all there was at the time. I was aware that other treatments would become available in the future but there was no time to wait for these alternatives to be developed and I had to start treatment straightaway to get rid of the virus. At the time my sister was GRO-C and I just wanted to get rid of the HCV as soon as possible.

18. The mental and physical effects of the treatment were traumatic. I became very, very depressed during the treatment, which finally came to an end in December 2007. I became so down that the consultant considered the option

of discontinuing treatment, but I was adamant I wanted to complete it. A letter from the specialist nurse to my GP from October 2007 (WITN1896003) says:

> '*Maureen was seen in clinic today having reached week 14 of a 24 week treatment programme. Maureen is currently feeling depressed and very low in mood. Her current medication is Zispin which was recently increased to 30 mgs od. She tells me that this has had no effect and her mood appears to be declining. Maureen lives alone and she does not feel she has adequate emotional support. She has no current thoughts of self-harming. She was seen by Dr Drake who discussed the option of discontinuing treatment. Maureen does not want to consider this option at this stage. Therefore Dr Drake has advised that Maureen see a psychiatrist as early as possible for an appointment for advice and management regarding depression. Maureen has agreed to this option and she has been referred to the Psychiatric Services today.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *A further review will take place in 1 week's tie and visits will continue weekly for additional support.*'

19. After treatment ended I went back to work as an advisor for Lancashire County Council with a £50,000 annual salary. However, in 2009 I began to suffer from a constant, mild headache. I was skiing in Austria with friends and on 10th February 2009 I collapsed with a left-sided intracerebral haemorrhage. I received treatment in Austria. I could not work. After a year I still could not speak and my ability to walk, read and write was severely limited. I could not return to work and had to retire due to ill health.

20. Under two years before my brain haemorrhage, in September 2007, **GRO-A** **GRO-A** had collapsed with a brain haemorrhage and subsequently died.

21. I feel I was very lucky to have been treated in Austria for my brain haemorrhage. If I had been in England I fear I would have died. I continue to suffer the effects of the brain haemorrhage and still have difficulties walking, communicating, singing and praying. My walking has improved but I still have difficulty getting in and out of the car. Two years after the haemorrhage I was diagnosed with epilepsy and am no longer unable to drive and am on medication for life. My left kidney has had to be removed. I do not know whether or not this was connected to HCV.

22. I now have to take disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARD) to slow the disease progression. The consultant thinks that it is not a rheumatic arthritis but is caused by dampening down of the immune system which may have implications in my case given the previous history of HCV. I have to take this medication for life, with regular blood liver and kidney tests.

23. My infected status has impacted on my treatment. I must have had HCV since 1978. Since diagnosis I now have to mention it when I have any treatment, whether medical or dental. People ask for my medical history and then they write it down. The latest was with my rheumatic arthritis. People don't always understand the links between brain haemorrhage and HCV but they always comment on my HCV status and make a note of it. I find this stigmatising.

24. HCV has impacted on my private, family and social life. Everyone thought that once treatment had finished in 2007 that would be the end of it. But the depression from the HCV has continued. The brain haemorrhage I suffered has had a devastating effect on my life. For, example, I spent this Christmas with my daughter and son-in-law, which is always lovely. I have problems with my speech but can listen and keep up with the conversation. However, I spent the rest of the day with my parents at their house, which was OK as they understand it is difficult for me to speak and they welcome me and one of them will always keep me in the conversation. However, when the other relations from our family come, they do not understand my speech difficulties and I simply sit out of the conversation. This situation is always the same with their

sons, daughters and friends – I cannot speak or join their conversation or listen. This is just the same wherever I go and I find it very depressing.

25. Before the treatment I had lots of friends. Now I see very few friends. I used to go out with a crowd in the evenings and I now spend time with just a single friend, or I spend time alone in my house. This happens a lot.

26. In terms of the stigma associated with a diagnosis of HCV, I have always been very 'up front' with myself and with all my friends – probably as I have been an advisor at the council. I have been very clear that my HCV came about as a result of a transfusion when giving birth to my daughter. However, I know I would suffer from a huge amount of stigma from other people if I had not been able to find the details of the transfusion.

27. Every time I am in contact with anyone from the medical profession, either in a hospital or at my GP surgery, or with anyone at the local council, I feel I have to explain why I have HCV. I feel devastated by this disease, and yet no one expresses any sympathy and no one asks how they can help me.

28. The work-related effects of being infected with HCV and the subsequent treatment have ended my career. When I finished the treatment I went to back to work and it was ok, although I was depressed for some time. Later, I had to give up work entirely as I was unable to work at all due to the brain haemorrhage. I really loved my job, and I wanted to go back to my career but I was just not able to do it.

29. Financially, I have been very affected. After the brain haemorrhage my salary continued at £50,000 for the first half of that year, then for the second half of that year it was reduced to £25,000. I had a reasonable private pension of £16,000 per year and was able to pay my mortgage, but this was much lower than my former income. I had to sell my four bedroom detached house and buy a two bedroom semi-detached bungalow. I have thought about doing

voluntary jobs but I cannot apply for anything because I cannot speak or write or hold conversations with people. HCV has impacted on my life in every way.

30. My infection has impacted on those close to me. My family, which includes my children, my parents and their wider family, have been supportive of my treatment, and they have also been checked and are clear of HCV themselves. Unfortunately, they believe my HCV has gone, but it has been infecting my body since 1978 and it has continuously damaged my body ever since, even though I am now 'clear'. My children have begun to understand that the ongoing problems will carry on.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

31. I faced some delay in obtaining treatment for HCV. Although I went to the GP in February 2007, it was not until July 2007 that I started receiving treatment, a delay of around five months. I have also faced some difficulties in obtaining treatment in consequence of being infected with HCV. For example, my GP has difficulty understanding my need for am 'MOT' each year.

32. I had counselling during the treatment but it didn't really work. I paid for acupuncture sessions myself every two weeks which gave me some relief.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

33. The Skipton Fund is the only Fund to have provided financial 'compensation' to me. I found out about the Fund myself, no one told me about it. I was told the name refers to a room in Parliament, the Skipton Room, where staff decide if a claimant has enough evidence or not to satisfy their criteria. I have received the Stage 1 payment of £20,000 though I had to find the evidence myself otherwise I was told I would not get the payment. I'm not eligible for anything from any of the other Trusts or Funds. My friend contacted the Skipton Fund for me but they say they do not know of any connection between HCV and

brain haemorrhage and so there has been no further financial support for the difficulties I have suffered as a result. This is despite Dame GRO-A and another person with HCV dying from brain haemorrhage, and another HCV infected person surviving a brain haemorrhage.

34. I did not experience any difficulties in applying for financial assistance and was helped by my GP and Lancaster County Council. The Skipton Fund precondition included needing to have proof of my infection by way of a transfusion which I had to find myself.

35. I think the payment of £20,000 that I received is completely inadequate. I have lost my job. My lost salary alone over the last nine years amounts to £306,000, plus all the associated benefits of being employed. I have lost my health and my social life too.

Section 8. Other Issues

36. HCV has affected my life since 1978. Even though I am 'clear', the effects of the virus continue for me. I was not told that I had been infected and had to pay to access my hospital and GP records and search through all of the medical records to find out about my transfusion. Some of my records are missing or they have been lost, I don't know which. I know I received a home visit in 1988 when I had flu but there is no record of this. Also, when my blood group changed in 1992 they should have investigated what the problem was, but they did not.

37. I hope the Inquiry is able to secure apologies from the governments from the 1970s onwards, and also from the NHS, the US government, US prisons and the drug companies.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 11 February 2019