

Witness Name: Christina Maher

Statement No.: WITN1926001

Dated: 8 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA MAHER

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Christina Maher. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry. I am making this statement as an affected individual. It was my beloved mum who contracted HCV through contaminated blood she received through a blood transfusion.
2. I live in GRO-C with my ex-partner and my grandson. I am disabled. Before this tragedy I was always training and I was a bodybuilder. Really every day is a chore. When I wake up I take 19 tablets. The things that are keeping me alive are my monkeys. I lost my dog on Christmas Eve; I had my dog for 12 years. Due to my illness, some of which I think are caused due to the stress of being an affected individual I have to take 31 tablets a day. For the past 5 years I have taken 75ml or oral morphine. I have had to undergo 15 operation.

Section 2. How Affected

3. It was my mum, Shirely Threlfall, who contracted HCV. Mum had 3 children – me, Jason and Michelle; Michelle is oldest. I am youngest. My

brother and sister were both born in [GRO-C] I was born in [GRO-C] When my mum found out she had HCV, she wanted to know how she became contaminated with HCV. Her doctors knew for a long time that she had it, but it seems that the doctor who used to look after my mum had passed away and no one opened his mail. So it was not disclosed to her at GP.

4. Mum was the queen bee of the family. I didn't realise how much she was loved until the day of her funeral; it was huge. The police had to stop the traffic in the middle of the road for a good 15 minutes so the cars could all pull out.
5. My mum was given a blood transfusion blood before, during and after my birth on [GRO-C] 1971. My mum got in touch with PALS about how to get her records. She was told she had to apply to Wythenshaw hospital where they were underground. My mum paid nearly £300 for them; she received a pack of records. My mum took out certain records before she showed them to me, and therefore, I didn't see when she had HCV, because she had taken documents out.
6. It was like that for 8 years after she died. Then I thought I would ask Skipton Fund for records, but the records were sent to my dad. My brother and sister read them as well. My brother phoned me to tell me that mum had HCV. He told me it was because of me; because mum needed a blood transfusion because of my birth. I knew it had been me. It is like you have a key and 50,000 doors and you know it fits, and there is one door it doesn't fit. I kept feeling like I was hitting this door, it was always the one door. I have been in a balloon since she has passed away and I cannot pop it; there is not a day goes by that I don't cry over my mum and what has happened. If I was not here, she would be alive.
7. When mum first found out she was ill her right side would stick out and she would call it her baby's head. I told her it was not funny and she

needed to deal with it. I used to take her to see the doctor and to the hospital. However, I was unwell myself. I used to fall asleep and starting moaning. I fell off the bed and dislocated my shoulder, or I might walk down the stairs and could fall asleep on stairs. These went to full blown fits.

8. I had to give my mum injections in her belly for 8 months. When we got up to Manchester Royal Hospital, we were told the injections would make her better. When we got to the hospital they showed us how to build the injection up, asked who wanted to do it; I said I would give the injections. I built it up, I gave her the injection, and we used to have to pick them up every 4 weeks.
9. But when my fits got worse my mum saw it and she got really scared. By this time she was downstairs on a bed in the living room. My dad had made her a portable toilet in the hallway because she could not manage stairs because of her breathing problems.
10. My fits cause me to put out discs out in my neck and in the bottom of my back. I have had three operations on my shoulder with screws and bolts, and six operations on my foot. I suffer with depression and I was self-harming myself up until about 7 months ago. And then it just came to me, and I thought to ask Skipton for her hospital records and find out if it was me that caused my mum to contract HCV.
11. When I got the papers, I thought, hang on, she was given the blood transfusion whilst I was in her womb and after my birth on GRO-C I was crying so much then. I think the injections were to help get the HCV under control. When we got mum to the hospital they told her gall bladder was pressing on liver which was making liver bleed, so she needed operation.

12. When we went into hospital said they would only keep in for day as did not want her to catch MRSA. She had COPD they said with one lung you need to fight this Shirley. Eventually she came out of anaesthetic after three hours. When she come home she burst into tears. She said I don't know how to tell your dad I have cirrhosis of the liver. At this stage she didn't know she had HCV. I got my dad, asked him to sit down. He asked mum why she was crying, and I told him she had cirrhosis of the liver. They both started crying. Six weeks later we had to take her back for check-up. I had an appointment over suspected breast cancer so I couldn't take her. My sister did, and that is when she found out she had HCV. She walked out of the doctor's room, and walked straight back in, and asked doctor again what he had just told her; that is when she did her own investigation into how she has contracted HCV. It flared up and so much of her liver was damaged, which could not be rectified.
13. I was a big baby; and my mum was only 4 foot ten. When she was pregnant with my sister and my brother she was about 7 stone, but with me she went up to about 11 stone. That was why she needed the blood, because I was too big, and so she was given blood when I was inside. When she gave birth she had a blood transfusion too. This happened at Wythenshaw Hospital.
14. On the night I found out she was dying my sister pulled up outside my house and she said do you want to come to the hospital, mum's breathing is a bit bad. I went there and when I got there mum was still with it, but the doctors were messing about with her, and the doctors asked for a word. My sister stayed with mum. I went in the room, it was so bright and white, but big, and he said to me that mum would not make it through the night and the room closed in on me. I asked 'what are you saying to me?' The doctor said they would have to sedate her and she is going to die. I asked if we had to get rest of family here; I remember

looking at my sister when I got back, and I said, 'you knew', and my mum looked at me, and she looked scared, and she said 'don't Tina'.

15. By the time dad got to mum she was already sedated so he never got to say goodbye to her. I put my head on her and I said go to sleep mum, and she squeezed my hand. I ran down the stairs to get my dad and he ran back up. He said to my mum *please squeeze my hand Shirley* but her brain was dead by then. My dad and I both suffer fits so we had to go home and I went with him to make sure he was ok.
16. I had to break the news to my children. Tony – my first son, was so close to my parents, I was alone when I was his mum, and he would be looked after by my parents so I could go out. Tony was so close to them. He has written a letter. It is quite upsetting; it is a really good letter though.
17. We had to give my mum the injections every Friday night at 9pm. It used to burn her belly, and would leave a really big red mark on side of her belly, so each Friday we would do a different side, because the last side would still be sore and red. It used to take me ten to 15 minutes to build it up, and I have to put the injection in at an angle to inject. I thought I was saving her life, but the injections did not work.
18. My mum had to have sickness tablets as well because the injections made her poorly. She was so sore to be touched. She was a very shy woman, when she had the operation on her gall bladder, it was me that cleaned her wounds, even though she was with my dad for 43 years she used to turn the light out when she got undressed and got in bed. They were together when my mum was 13. They got married when she was 16. And they stayed together.
19. I do not think my mum was told about any risks before she was given the blood transfusion; at least that is what my parents said. My mum cooked a Sunday dinner for my dad's sister and her children because she

brought them up as well. Later on she said to my dad I am going to get a bath and then go to hospital. In those days they did not let partners go in. When she was in the hospital, there must have been something wrong, because within 10 minutes they heard the baby screaming. Staff came out and said Mr Threlfall you have had a little girl but you can't see her yet because looking after wife. My dad asked why, but all the staff said was that she was ok and that staff were looking after her. If she had known there was a risk she would have tried anything else first; she would have gotten the blood transfusion from a family member]

- 20 My mum contacted HCV from contaminated blood. She was given the infected blood through a blood transfusion.
- 21 My mum was told she had received contaminated blood during an appointment at Thameside Hospital when she went back after the 6 weeks. It came up in a general conversation; the doctor said something about her gall bladder and then said *but your HCV has flared up very aggressively, and you will need to go to Manchester for injections*. This was about 2004. She walked out, stopped, turned around, told patient who had gone in after her to get out, and said to doctor what did you just tell me? The doctor did not give her any information. We didn't know she was going to die. I have had the blood test. I am told I do not have HCV. I have my bloods done every three months, including the HCV test. When she found out she had HCV she was not given information about precautions to keep us safe and we were not told what to go to try to make sure we did not get HCV from her. We just tried our best to make her life happy.

Section 3. Other Infections

- 22 No, my mum did not have any other infections.

Section 4. Consent

- 23 I don't think my mum had a clue about what might happen to her when she was given the blood transfusion. I think she thought she had cancer or something with this lump, gall bladder, she used to joke it off, they wouldn't keep her in, they sent her straight home the next day, she had a low immune system so prone to catching anything dead quick. She had surgical stuff on her hands, she would tell me to put it on my hands if I was going to clean her. If she had been told that there was a chance she could catch HCV having the blood I would have guess she would have said get the blood off me family. My mum was not told of the risks, and therefore, she didn't give full consent
- 24 I think she was used as a guinea pig for research. A couple of weeks before she died we asked for an oxygen machine for her, she was sleeping and would wake up and then fall back to sleep again. They told us it would take two weeks to apply; three weeks to find out whether we would get it, and two weeks after that. On the Monday she said she was ready to go into hospital and the following Sunday she was dead; she died on 9 August 2009.

Section 5. Impact

- 25 Her teeth were falling out. She had nose bleeds quite a lot. She never had dirty ears, but she was having dark blood coming from her ear. She had to wear a kaftan because of the weight she put on, and as soon as she was told she had HCV she gave up; she wouldn't win, when she found out she had asthma she got through it because they were treating her for angina for first 18 months, and then found out it was asthma. She was alright, when this lump started coming and was swelling up after food and drink. Then it came to a standstill, and then an appointment at Manchester Royal. This nurse, we were sat in there, we were in a room

where they take your blood, my sister was sat on the long bed, the nurse was showing us how to insert it, and asked if we could. She asked who would; my sister said no, I said I would. She took it apart and asked me to build it up like I had done. I sat on the bed, I crochet hats and scarves for the homeless, and anything that I look at I only have to watch it once and I can do it. I watched her doing this, and I didn't know we were going to have to build these; same time each Friday. So I could do it. It took about 10 minutes to do. And then I started giving the injections and it took my dad 16 weeks to learn how to build it. He tried everything you know to keep her going. The following Friday it would be black and blue, She was started off on number 5, the maximum was 5, she started on this.

- 26 She had to have sickness tablets because she was sick all the time. She was always sleeping, but then she couldn't lie down and sleep because of her asthma. She would choke. She gave up smoking a few months before she died. She was hallucinating with the drugs. When we lost mum, we lost each other. She kept the family together. We have all turned on each other.
- 27 My mum wasn't given treatment straight away; it was like trying to get blood out of a stone. Doctors tried to do all sorts of different things before they said she could have the treatment and finally sent to Manchester Royal, but Thameside kept going backwards and forwards about appointments. It was years before she got the right treatment. The treatment did not start until about 12 months to 18 months before she died. She should have been given treatment earlier.
- 28 She was so down, mentally, I think she was scared. She had lost her sister when my aunty was 60, and that had a very big impact on her life, because she was so close to her. GRO-C's mum, we found her dead in bed one Sunday night, which made a big impact in my dad's life, because

my mum and dad got on with her great. When she found out she had the HCV I think she didn't care any more about anything, she was more bothered about us, was trying to give us money all the time. Sat there and sorted out her jewellery, who she was giving what to. I feel like I have let her down. It destroyed her really, you couldn't get cuddles out of her, because she was so sore to touch. We used to take her, about a year before she died, to my friend's hotel and she would sit downstairs for half an hour, so we could go to a show early, then she would go straight upstairs with the dog, Suki, a Shitsu. It was hard because you were going to see her and because of her medication she was asleep and then she would wake up and ask how you were.

29 As a family, we all chipped in together. We didn't really have a life. Every single one of us stopped having our own lives, everything stopped. For my mum, it had an impact on her social life – she wouldn't go out, she couldn't go out, she had put too much weight on, she would get embarrassed because of the size of her. She was so sore to touch. When she found out she had cirrhosis of the liver she broke down crying. When she had her gall bladder removed and she only stayed in overnight and she was crying her eyes out on the bed. When I told my dad they both cried together.

30 I can imagine the way she reacted when she found out she had HCV. Staff at Thameside just said we would send you to Manchester Royal so you are seeing someone else again and having to repeat your life story to them. It was all waiting rooms. That's all I remember. And different doctors; I can see her getting flustered because she had to explain herself again. The doctors just did not look at the file to find out what was wrong; like when the nurse told us about the injection. She went so fast – it was all so quick. I think I should not have been giving her those injections, when I look back, you had to build them, clean it, go in at an angle, and put head of needle on last before you did everything, and then

clean the wound with wipes, and then make sure you cover it with a plaster, so that it doesn't get infected, because she had a low immune system because of what was wrong with her. I don't think I should have been doing that. I think a nursing team should have been doing this for her, we were already going through so much watching her crying and getting depressed and down. She has gone from having a life to having nothing. Not even able to get upstairs because she couldn't breathe. It took her ten minutes to get from living room to hallway where dad had built her a toilet. I have not got my friend there anymore. My mum was my best mate, I could tell her anything in the world, I wasn't scared of telling her anything.

- 31 Mentally – it is just torturing me. I wake up at night and I am crying, or I wake up and I have wet myself because I have had a fit in my sleep. It has destroyed me mentally. People have still got their nana and as well as their mum at my age, I have not got any of them. The only girl I can turn to and talk to is my daughter, she is my best friend, I love her to pieces. It is hard to talk to the boys. Recently things seem to get getting to her more, she is hurting and crying a lot now. So I have to be the strong one. Emotionally – it has devastated me, to the point where I won't give up until we get an apology.
- 32 Social life – I don't go out, I used to have a social life but I stopped it. I am sick of people saying they don't want me to talk about it. People say they don't want to talk about it, but it is not their mum, it is not them going through what I am going through. I want to talk about it. I want a living memory of her. People will come and see me and they say they won't want to talk about that, and then I am quiet because I want to talk about her all the time, I miss her so much. I probably am getting on people's nerves. She was amazing, she was beautiful. She was an amazing mum. We did pranks together.

- 33 Mum got her first payment in 2005, and because of cirrhosis she got more money, but never got to see rest of money because she died in 2009, Skipton and MacFarlane, it come out because they doubled the money, so my dad got it in 2011. People were getting extra money and I was saying don't you think your dad should get that and they said no, mum had passed away. I was trying to get him money, things off Caxton, furniture, and I got him his £10,000. Mum got a bit of money off the Skipton, but I didn't really know about it until after she died. I didn't know about it, she was personal with her money.
- 34 I do not think there was stigma for us because we never let anyone know on the outside. We were always brought up, what was said within the four walls stay within the four walls. We were all sworn to my mum. She was embarrassed about what she had; so by that token it seems we knew there was stigma, which is why we didnt talk about it to anyone outside of the family.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

- 35 It took at long time before she got the injections. I just assumed they were normal, basic injections, I didn't know that they were a lot of money, until they said you had to go to the hospital and pick them up from there every 4 weeks, you couldn't get them on repeat from the doctor. If you broke one you couldn't get another one, she had to miss it. I never broke one.
- 36 When they realised it was HCV it was like she went to the bottom of the pile for everything else. They just seemed to be taking blood off her all the time; they didn't give her things like oxygen. When she got pneumonia and she got a blood clot on her lung, if they had checked her blood then she may have still been alive now, in the 1990s. It was about

2002 that she found out that she knew she was properly not well and about the gall bladder.

- 37 Yes, my doctor has offered me counselling. I spoke to a nurse, I was in hospital for five days for my fits. She came and talked to me and within 10 minutes of her talking to me I ended up having two fits, because she didn't want to talk about my mum, she wanted to delve deeper into my personal life, I didn't want to tell her about the things you have wrapped up in a box and put to the back of your brain. When I do want to talk about her to people, they told want to talk about her, they don't want to disclose anything. They don't want to answer your questions, because I think they are frightened of putting their foot in it, or they think you are going to sue them. That is the feeling I get. They don't want to discuss or talk about it because as soon as you mention HCV and how she got it, and hoping I have not got it, the nurse in the room with the doctor will sit a bit further away from me, and change the subject and don't want to talk about it.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

- 38 I think my mum received the £25,000 first, and then £20,000 for cirrhosis of the liver, or the other way round. In 2011 they gave more, but mum had already died, so they gave it to my dad. He split it with his three children because we have all looked after her. It was £25,000. She got her first payment in 2005, and because of cirrhosis she got more money, but never got to see rest of money because she died in 2009.

Section 8. Other Issues

- 39 I hope that through the Inquiry people will achieve some justice. People's families want the apology they should be given. Excuses are not needed in this case; there is no excuse for it.

Statement of Truth

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

Signature: ...

GRO-C

Dated08.02.2019.....