Witness Name: Kevin William Farthing
Statement No: WITN4395001
Exhibits: **WITN4395002**
Dated: 02 February 2023

# INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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# WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KEVIN WILLIAM FARTHING

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 01 October 2021.

I, Kevin Farthing, will say as follows: -

## Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Kevin Farthing. My date of birth is GRO-C 1956. I live in GRO-C and my full address is known to the Inquiry. I was born in GRO-C and have lived there all my life. I am married to my wife Christina and we have 2 children; Selina who is 33 years old and Jessica who is 28 years old; we have one grandchild who is 5 years of age.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV). In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me, my family and our lives together.

3. I confirm that I am not currently legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement. I have had the Inquiry's

statement of approach explained to me and the option to be an anonymous witness. However, I am not seeking anonymity and I wish for my statement to be known in full. My wife Christina has assisted and supported me in giving this statement.

## Section 2. How Infected

4. I believe in all probability that I was infected due to blood and/or blood products given to me before or during my operation of 4 August 1988. My operation and anaesthetic medical record dated 4 August contains incorrect information and is blank apart from my name, date of birth, age (29), gender and ward. On the prescription sheet my age is incorrectly recorded as 34 (I've aged 5 years in a couple of days!). I gave up work because I was so poorly as a result of the HCV infection and my injuries sustained in an industrial accident at work. With regards to the HCV infection, I had a really aggressive strain of the virus.

5. I had been a tradesman, working as a 'marker-off' which involved marking holes in the metal, which is one down from a draughtsman. A 'marker-off' is regarded as the most highly skilled person on the shop floor, due to the accuracy required and it is a very physical job involving a great deal of lifting.

6. I was previously made redundant some years before the industrial accident at work. After the redundancy, I got a job at CNC computer machines. Whilst working there I got my thumb caught in a machine and so the insurance company didn't want me to work on that machine anymore, so I had to move to a different machine.

7. Mr Piggott, my surgeon, also operated on my thumb in 1986 and set it in such a way so as to avoid it catching on things. I was fortunate to have him operate on me again, following my later, second workplace accident, affecting my foot.

8. On 4 August 1988, I had the accident which affected my toes as a result of a crush injury to my right foot. I was wearing steel toe capped boots at the time and I was working on the machine which was used to cut circles out of the square plates. The process involved kicking the excess material away, but unfortunately, as I kicked the waste material away it pushed into the steel toe caps of my boots and lifted me up, crushing the steel caps of my boots into my foot. The toe caps were crushed beyond recognition.

9. I have no memory of going from the machine to the floor. The police had been in the factory the night before as there had been a break in and Health and Safety were involved straight away which was lucky for me.

10. After my accident, I was still conscious. The police officer said that he had never seen such a strong lad. I said to him I know that I have lost two toes, can I have a look and I accepted what I saw. My wife told me that the policeman commented on how strong I was in accepting what had happened. They couldn't believe this. I am a strong person, I have had to be. I have always tried to work. I have previously worked in the city centre in Newcastle bars and if you can work there, you can work anywhere.

11. I was taken to Newcastle General Hospital to the plastic surgery unit which is no longer there now. I was seen by Mr Piggott who was regarded as the top plastic surgeon in the country and I consider myself very lucky to have been treated by him. I think we are fortunate up here in the North as we have a lot of hospitals with specialist staff.

12. On the day of the accident, I had lunch at 12.00 noon, the accident occurred at 3.30pm. Therefore, it was too soon after eating in terms of being able to have the operation, so I had to wait until midnight. I remember being partly awake after the operation. I came around from the operation quicker than I should have done. I woke up and went back to sleep. I had the operation at midnight but I was awake at around 8 or

9.00am, I came around much quicker than expected because I was so fit.

13. My toes were crushed in the industrial accident and I had to have two toes amputated by Mr Piggott. However, a year later the nerve endings were still there and causing problems, because they were trying to grow back, which Mr Piggott was really surprised about. I still have open nerves as they continued to grow.

14. After losing 2 toes I used to cover my foot with a towel on holidays. I experienced a lot of tears over the years and on one occasion after my accident, I broke down and couldn't stop crying after falling down the stairs.

15. Following the foot surgery, I remained in hospital for 20 days. I was in a bad way physically and my sister-in-law remembers asking if the blood plasma on the drip she saw was for me as I had lost a lot of blood. They confirmed that it was.

16. My wife was only 25 years old at the time. She remembers driving to my work place at the usual time to pick me up but the police were waiting for her. They escorted her to the hospital. She can't remember much about it because she was distressed and disorientated at the time, but she distinctly remembers seeing some blood bags by the bed and asking the nurse about the bags, what it was, and what it was for.

17. Due to the severity of the injury, they didn't know how much blood I had lost, they just knew that my foot was crushed and that there was blood coming out. I remember that they had to cut my jeans and my boots off.

18. They gave me morphine and they gave me the maximum dose so I can't remember much, but there was no indication that there was any risk in giving me the blood.

19. At the time of the accident, I was 29 years old and I was a very fit man, I used to run and I weighed only 10.5 stones and I had just competed in the Great North Run, finishing in 1 hour 29 minutes. I had a very low pulse rate of 30-40 beats per minute (bpm). When I had the accident, my pulse was the normal rate for most people but normal for me is 30-40 bpm. When I had the accident my pulse rate was normal. I think that my being so fit saved my life, but I was a young lad with no fat on me and I think this helped me as I could have gone into shock. This is something that I still think about.

20. Following the accident, I couldn't do anything sport-wise again, I had to stop playing golf and football and I regret that.

21. A year later, following the operation, I went to see Mr Piggott on 11 August 1989. I was still using a walking stick at the time as the nerves had not stopped growing in my toes, as mentioned above, so I was back to square one. Mr Piggott couldn't believe it.

22. I started to feel tired a year after the accident. Tiredness started to kick-in and I started to put on a lot of weight as I wasn't able to do anything. I had previously weighed 10 stones when I was in hospital following the accident, and then I put on a stone and a half in a matter of 6 months of being out of hospital. I wasn't doing much as I wasn't able to and then I had the second operation due to the nerve endings re-growing.

23. I started to get a pain in my shoulder which began in the year we moved house, before we had our second daughter, Jessica. I thought I had hurt my back pulling a muscle moving house. I started to feel lethargic so I went to physiotherapy, where they told me that it was the way I was walking which was starting to affect me. At the time I wasn't working and I was receiving government benefits.

24. In 1993 my wife and I went on holiday to Tenerife during the school half term break, but before we went on holiday, I had given blood. We came back home to find a letter from the National Blood Transfusion Service,

to say that I had contracted HCV and that I should speak to my GP about it. The letter stated that because I had HCV they were not able to use my blood.

25. We had no idea what the letter from the blood transfusion people was about. I went to the see my GP, Dr Cope. My GP didn't know anything about it or HCV, and he didn't know where I had acquired HCV from.

26. Dr Cope, who was head of our GP practice, wrote a letter to Professor James dated 24 November 2003, which read,

> *"I would be grateful for your help with this patient who has been found to have hepatitis C antibodies. He is at present asymptomatic and is in otherwise good health. He does not at present know anything about the implication of his problems and I don't feel we should worry him too much."* **WITN4395002**

27. I was referred to the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle by my GP, where I saw Margaret Bassandine who was a consultant. She is very nice and a really lovely person who treats you as though you are a friend. I remained under her care until she retired. I then saw a Scottish doctor called Stewart McPherson, following Margaret Bassandine's retirement.

28. I am now seen by Dr Schmid from whom I receive fabulous care and I couldn't fault it. I don't feel there was any neglect but more that I was given blood that should not have been distributed.

29. Margaret Bassandine told me that it was a 99.9 per cent certainty that I could only have contracted HCV from the blood I received following my accident at work. I have never taken drugs or shared needles and have only ever had one partner, my wife Christina.

30. I was diagnosed with mild chronic hepatitis C – genotype 1b and I have a copy of a letter written by Margaret Bassendine to my GP which states

that I was found to be a non-responder to combination anti-viral therapy, for which I undertook an initial treatment for 12 months in 2001. This was the first of 4 drug trials.

31. As previously stated, I had an aggressive strain of the virus. Dr Bassendine said that I had definitely been given infected blood and that she was 99.9% certain of this.

32. At first, I was alright and was just dealing with the after-effects of my injury. By 1993-94 I started to see a difference and that is when it all started. I thought it was when we moved house and I thought that I had hurt my back moving furniture during the move. The hospital also thought that I had hurt my back and the physiotherapist said there was nothing they could do about it.

33. The Hepatitis infection made the effects of the painkillers less effective. The pain in my shoulder boils down to the hepatitis, but at the time I didn't know that I had HCV. I was constantly tired, I wasn't sleeping and I was waking up a lot throughout the night, due to the pain in my shoulder.

34. I was put on a very strong pain killer, which I took once a day, this killed the pain but I didn't realise how strong it was. I remember going to a friend's house and he gave me one glass of homemade wine which knocked me out!

35. As soon as I was cured of HCV in 2016 the pain in my back and foot disappeared all of a sudden, although I am left still in some discomfort, I am not in pain. So, I think, prior to my successful treatment and being given the all-clear of HCV, my body was succumbing to the virus which was causing me so much pain in my back and foot.

36. My oldest daughter was 4 years old when I found out that I had HCV. Up until that stage I was just dealing with the foot injury and I didn't know about the HCV.

37. I have a curved spine as a result of the accident and as a result of the way I walk because the muscle has dropped. Part of my immune system has altered. I was in some discomfort all the time.

38. All of this was going on at the time and then to find out that I had HCV, came as a shock. I thought how did I get that, I have never taken drugs and only ever had one partner.

## Section 3. Other Infections

39. There was no indication that I was infected with anything else other than HCV. I had a full medical check on everything and my cholesterol levels were perfect. I think they may have tested for other infections but I really cannot confirm that this definitely happened.

## Section 4. Consent

40. After the accident I was given morphine and they gave me the maximum dose, so I can't remember much, but I don't recall that there was any indication that there was a risk with the blood I was given, as mentioned earlier in my statement. My wife is of the view that we would have just gone with what needed to be done at the time.

## Section 5. Impact

41. It is a hard thing to explain the effects of the virus as I wasn't impacted prior to being informed that I had HCV. Once I was diagnosed, I spoke to my GP, and he said there was nothing to worry about, as it was a small blood infection. Nevertheless, it was a shock when I found out that I had HCV.

42. I was unable to sleep or work as a result of the HCV. Tiredness started to kick in and I put on a lot of weight as I wasn't able to do anything. I was 10 stone when I was in hospital then I put on a stone and a half in a matter of 6 months, after being discharged from hospital. I was starting to feel tired the year after the accident. I wasn't doing much as I wasn't physically able to. Then I had another operation due to the nerve endings issue in my right foot. We had our eldest daughter Selina at that time and my wife was working, but I was not able to do much really due to the accident.

43. I started the first HCV treatment in 2001 which was supposed to last for 9 months, but after 7 months it was stopped because my viral level went up. They had told me that as long as the drug was working and the level of virus was not increasing, all was well, but they said if it went up then they would stop the trial.

44. *I took Interferon as the main drug during the treatment, which I self-*injected once a week and took Ribavirin tablets orally every day. I thought I would be able to inject myself straight away but I remember when I went to do it the first time, I froze. I was told not to worry as everyone does the same. However, I was surprised by my reaction.

45. I had 3 liver biopsies over a period of a few years at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle. For the first one I had to stay in hospital overnight and for the next one I went in at 06:00 or 07:00am in the morning, and I was able to leave by 6pm.

46. Now I have fibroscans instead of liver biopsies. They introduced a new machine which just 'pings' on you (non-invasive as a liver biopsy would be) and if the result has not deteriorated from the previous result, you are alright. You can imagine what that feels like, as I didn't know if my liver had deteriorated each time.

47. Every 6 months I had to go to the Freeman Hospital for a check-up, which early on involved a liver biopsy, then fibroscans, and blood tests

to assess the level of HCV. It was horrible. I would ring the nurse specialist (Kerry Baxter) and she would tell me that everything was the same, to my relief. I used to get two buses to go to the hospital rather than trying to park the car.

48. Between both fibroscans, the nurse specialist – Kerry Baxter, told me that everything was fine. I had the nastiest strain of the virus and they couldn't understand why I wasn't seriously ill. They said it didn't make sense, as I was somewhere in the middle and they didn't know why my liver was not as bad as they thought it would have been, given the aggressive strain of the virus. The readings of my liver function tests didn't indicate a reading as high as it should. They told me that I was a one off.

49. I was told that should I require a liver transplant in the future, that it would have been very difficult to find a donor to match my blood group and that if I developed cirrhosis, I would have in the region of 3 years to live without a transplant.

50. I had my second round of HCV treatment in 2007. Again, I took Interferon but with a different oral medication this time. I think that it was definitely a trial and that I was just a guinea pig. However, don't get me wrong, someone has to trial these drugs. I kept thinking I have got to find a cure for it, so I had to go through it. The worse thing was the stress of it not working as they were saying that the chances are that there is no cure, you are going to die.

51. My wife believes that because I was a fit man, it definitely helped. If other people were not as fit as I was, it would definitely have had a worse effect on them.

52. *I was due to take the second course of HCV medication for 11 months,* but the treatment collapsed at 9 months, exactly the same as before. It was working and I was going into hospital for check-ups every 2 to 3

weeks. Then I was given new drugs and they told me that it hadn't worked.

53. It made me feel horrible as I had been going through hell for 9 months for it not to work. During this second round of treatment, I suffered the same side effects as the first treatment.

54. The third trial took place in 2011, which was the one where I was really ill. Again, this trial didn't work. I went to hell and back. I felt like I was actually dying.

55. During this trial I had Interferon again along with other tablets. I was like a pin cushion and I ended up black and blue with them having to find new places to inject. My white and red blood cells and platelets were shot. I was down to 10 stone because due to the treatment I had no appetite and all dairy products made me feel sick. I drank no alcohol throughout any of the treatments.

56. I had to inject a lot more on this course of treatment - every day. It was an 11 month trial and 8 months into treatment I became very ill. Blood was taken every time I went in for a check-up, which was either weekly or fortnightly. I noticed that they put a skull and cross bone around my file to signify that I had dodgy blood.

57. During this round of treatment, they said that I needed to have an injection, which was given at about 8 months into the treatment, as I was not in good health, which I knew.

58. I couldn't go on holiday because I was ill and shaking. On one occasion during this phase of treatment, a specialist nurse called in on her way home and gave me an injection. She stood in our porch and administered the injection. She said, "You are actually dying." 100mls was needed for the injection but the Freeman Hospital had run out of the medication. They usually had 1 to 2 batches of the drug in stock but they had run out, so they ordered it in specially to keep me alive.

59. My oxygen levels were low and I had to inject myself every day. I developed sores and ulcers across the inside of my mouth as a result of the treatment, and the nurse said that she should have taken photos, as she had never seen anything like it.

60. I had lost about 1.5 stones and I was prescribed fortified energy drinks, which was like drinking emulsified paint, it was supposed to be strawberry flavoured but it had no fruit in it. The treatment worked up to 11 months which was the end of the trial. It was working but they stopped it at 11 months as they told me that the virus had gone. However, I had to go back after 3 months for a check-up, and guess what, it was back!

61. Can you imagine how I felt? I was in tears, I was devastated. You have been cured, then you are told you are not cured. My daughter was working abroad at the time, we were all devastated, the children were crying, we were all crying. We had been through hell for 11 months and the one thing pushing me forward was that the treatment was working. Caroline, the specialist nurse said that she had never seen anyone react to the medication as badly as I had. The drugs affected me badly. They told me that they needed to reduce the dose because I was so ill.

62. The specialist nurse, told us that the medication cost thousands of pounds. The fact that the drugs were so expensive was specifically empathised. However, I didn't have to pay for my medication as I was told that it was a trial. I collected the medication from the hospital.

63. The fourth and final course of treatment which I took in 2016, worked after only 3 months of taking it. My liver function stayed the same, although apparently it should have been going down.

## Financial impact

64. HCV impacted 10 years of our lives and the formative years of our children's lives, whereby they missed out on their father. I wasn't working so I didn't have much money. I got compensation of about £100,000 for my foot. I suggested that we sell the house because we had wanted to extend it, but the council wouldn't grant permission, so we moved. I paid for our new house in cash which cost £60,000. We thought that was the best way of using the money, because we didn't know what the future held. That way if anything happened to me then Christina and the children had somewhere to live.

65. We didn't have a mortgage or rent to pay, but I couldn't be actively involved in our children's upbringing because I was so ill, so Christina ran the family. I couldn't do anything really. I was there, I did a bit of decorating and whatever else I could manage, which the was a lot less than before the accident and the effects of the HCV, and subsequently compared to what I can do now.

Impact:

66. Often, I wouldn't go on holiday as I was not well and I just had to get on with it. My children knew that their father was not well. There were times *I had to stay at home when my family went on outings, as I was too ill.*

67. I remember on one occasion we went to Craigside Hall which is a National Trust property during a bank holiday. I took the HCV drugs that morning. We were going there for the day and it was the first time that I thought I would be okay, but I had to stay in the car. All of a sudden, I felt ill, I was shaking and sweating. The effects of the medication hit me and my wife drove back, because I was really ill. That occurred during the first round of treatment. When I realised how strong the drugs were, I stopped going out after taking the medication because the next day I was always ill.

68. GRO-C

Going to the Freeman Hospital every 6 months took precedence over everything. Everything revolved around the hospital appointments.

69. I also had to deal with periods of having no treatment, so I was really just playing a waiting game, not knowing if the outcome was death or existing, as it was what I was experiencing at that moment in time. The more we got to know about HCV, the more intense the fear became.

70. I was put on another trial at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, where some people were given placebos. It was definitely a trial which I agreed to. I don't know which medication I was given but it was to test your blood. They gave you breakfast. This trial occurred sometime between 2007-2011 and was something quite separate from the HCV treatment. This trial took place at same time as the HCV treatment I was taking which I underwent in 2011 but was separate to the HCV treatment.

71. I was getting to that point where I was not going to take part in any more trials. Everything revolved around the hospital. However, I always thought that I had to fight on and I am pleased that I continued with the last trial as I was cured in the end.

72. For the last and final round of treatment, I questioned whether I wanted to put myself through it again, and if it hadn't worked, I wasn't going prepared to put myself through a further trial.

73. The impact of being infected with HCV went on for most of our married life. Christina and I were together 8 years before we had our first child. Christina had her own hairdressing and bridal hire business and we decided that we would have a child as we knew I wasn't going to be working because of the accident.

74. Christina carried on working throughout my illness. The children have suffered because of it, when they were little, they didn't know much about it, but as they got older, they understood more.

75. We were really financially comfortable until it all went downhill. We spent all our time at the hospital. We are really lucky that we are really strong

and stuck together as a lot of couples would have just split up because of the arguments, but Christina didn't know what I was going through at the time.

76. During the third round of HCV treatment, Christina was worried about me getting depressed and my state of mind. However, I didn't want to put anyone through that as my granddad committed suicide. Christina remembers one day during the 3rd round of treatment when the children were growing up, I went out because I couldn't cope with the noise at home. Christina said to me, don't you dare do anything that will leave me at home with the children on my own. I would say that it was about 8-9 months of hell, as it takes a bit of time for the adverse effects of the medication to kick in. As mentioned previously, the previous 2 drug treatments were also awful and Christina says that obviously she didn't experience what I felt and only had an insight into it.

77. I got ringworm due to my suppressed immune system. Since I have been cured of HCV, I can't eat anything spicy or too hot.

78. As mentioned, I took the fourth course of HCV treatment in 2016 which cured the virus. The medication was developed in Texas, USA and was in tablet form. It was my belief that it had been the Interferon that had been making me ill, but I was told that Interferon was definitely not used in the fourth drug trial.

79. I was cautious about going on the fourth trial as I had been so ill previously. However, I was told that it was only going to last for 3 months.

80. The fourth drug trial was successful in clearing the virus. I was told about it initially but I was told that it was not available in this country and then I was offered it.

81. I was told that the other interferon medication I had taken was oral chemotherapy. The treatment took its toll on my bones and body.

82. The clinicians told me that they would let me know at the end of the 3 month trial if I had cleared the virus and then I would need to go for further check-ups, which initially would be every 3 months and then reducing to once a year, so I didn't build up my hopes. I had to wait the whole year and that was a long year. I was down in London when I received the phone call to tell me that I was cured. My friend hugged me and I rang my wife and daughter to tell them. The phone kept pinging and everyone was so delighted for me, as they had seen what I had gone through and what we went through as a couple. I was left in limbo with no further test from the end of the treatment period up until being told I was all clear.

83. The treatment consisted of a 12 week course of Abbvie and Ribavirin. Following the 6 weeks post-treatment I was negative. They confirmed that I was cured.

Stigma:

84. With regards to stigma, a girl working in a local shop asked me if I was feeling down and told me I looked ill. I told her that I was on HCV treatment. I have never held it back. I told my friends about the contaminated blood and how I got HCV. Early on people didn't understand and thought it was AIDS. My brother saw me lick a spoon once and reacted adversely and I told him you couldn't get it like that. However, I always carried a plaster in my wallet as I knew it was transmissible by blood, and we always had bleach in the home as they told us to clean thoroughly if I cut myself. If I cut myself, we would get the children out of the way, this was normality for us and we would clean all the surfaces.

85. On another occasion I suffered the effects of stigma from a physiotherapist at the health centre at Prince Consort Road, Gateshead, who refused to treat me and wouldn't touch me because of the HCV. My

GP was furious and said it was their job to treat me. Instead, I had to have an injection from my GP for my frozen elbow in place of the physiotherapist treating me.

86. I was also refused dental treatment from our family dentist in Whickham, so I had to go to the Royal Victoria Infirmary for dental treatment. I mention this in more detail in Section 6 of my statement. I could have taken offence, but sometimes you have to accept that people are ignorant about HCV. You can only tell people that they won't catch it.

87. None of my family or children have been adversely affected with regards to stigma, and as far as my children are concerned, they grew up the same as any other children, and they just got on with it.

88. My friends stuck by me 100 percent. I used to put people right when they used to talk incorrectly about it. Christina told me that on one occasion when she was cutting a lady's hair, the lady took excessive precautions by wiping the door handles etc, so Christina told her that you cannot get HCV like that.

89. My wife commented that it is awful to think that in giving blood, you may have been responsible for infecting somebody else. I had been a regular blood donor before having my blood rejected by the Blood Transfusion Service.

90. The Covid pandemic has been serious for everyone, but it is nothing for me because it is what I have been doing all my life in terms of precautions.

## Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

91. Mr Piggott who carried out my surgeries and Dr Bassendine were highly professional people, my wife describes Margaret Bassendine as a caring woman who really wanted me to get better.

92. The nurse specialist, Caroline, was also very good. They were all outstanding, you never felt like you were badly treated, and you were treated very well. There was never an issue from our point of view. We felt they were doing everything in their power to help us. If you were feeling down they would support and reassure you. They were as upset as we were when the treatment didn't work.

93. I remember on one occasion, when giving blood for a blood test at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, the vein burst. I did not realise at first and only found out when I noticed blood dripping down my arm on my way to the car park, so I went back to the hospital. Another time with one of the nurses taking blood from my arm, it went up like a balloon and was covered in bruising.

94. As previously mentioned, I am now under the care of Dr Schmid from whom I receive fabulous care and I couldn't fault it. I don't feel there was any neglect, but more that I was given blood that should not have been distributed.

95. There was no difficulty in obtaining the HCV treatment from the Freeman Hospital. They used to give me a prescription to take to the Pharmacy, and then I would go back to give blood, and then pick up my prescription.

96. Dr Bassendine started me on the Interferon treatment for the hepatitis. I do however, feel that I was a bit of a guinea pig in terms of research. I knew it was a trial and I wanted the treatment because I was in that much pain. I was told that it was not costing the Freeman Hospital anything as it was given by the government and not coming out of the hospital's budget.

97. I was never offered any psychological support or counselling and no-one ever suggested it. I felt that had it been available, I would have benefitted from it and it would have helped stopped family arguments at the time when I was struggling.

98. GRO-C

GRO-C I was worried that I might pass it on. If I cut myself and there was any blood anywhere, I made sure bleach was used and that the area was cleaned properly.

99. With regards to dental treatment, no dentist would touch me and I had to go to a special unit for any treatment. However, they had to close the unit as they could not find a dentist to work there. They used to put cling film and bubble wrap on any chair or surface that I was likely to be in contact with. When I left, they would remove it and replace it for the next patient.

100. As previously mentioned, I was unable to get a dentist locally, and was told that they wouldn't touch me. Even high street dentists could be cautious about the HCV.

101. I have a letter dated 24 November 2003 from Margaret Bassendine addressed to my GP, Dr Cope, which states that I had mild chronic hepatitis C and that I was a non-responder to combination antiviral therapy taken for 12 months in 2001. The letter states that I participated in a mild hepatitis C study and where I agreed to a post treatment live biopsy in April 2003, stating that I still showed mild chronic hepatitis with no fibrosis. However, the dates cited in this letter are incorrect because it was after the operation that I found out I had HCV. I believe that I was infected during my operation of 1988. However, I was not diagnosed until 1993-94 when I was attempting to be a blood donor.

## Section 7. Financial Assistance

102. We have had a real struggle financially over the years my friends and colleagues have been able to save into private pension schemes which

they now all benefit from. I however, have not had that opportunity as I was unable to work. I applied for jobs but I couldn't get them.

103. It was cruel to take my Personal Invalidity Pension (PIP) away. I was told by a Job Centre employee that I was unemployable due to my foot injury. Because I have an industrial pension, I wasn't eligible to receive any other benefits. Therefore, there is no advantage for me having the industrial pension as this takes me over the threshold for other benefits.

104. They took my Disability Allowance, now called Personal Independence Payments (PIP) away from me 2 years ago and I believe that it was taken away because I was cured of HCV. As a result, my financial income significantly reduced and my wife only receives the minimum wage in her job.

105. Additionally, I lost my 'Motability' allowance despite having previously been given it for life. They changed the rules and reassessed everybody, and as a result I no longer qualify for it.

Application for financial assistance:

106. Margaret Bassendine told us about the Skipton Fund and advised me to go down this route and told me that I should receive it. However, I told her that I had no medical records or proof. Margaret Bassendine was later aware that we had been refused Skipton funding due to the lack of medical evidence.

107. Since meeting with the Inquiry Team in giving my statement, I have recently made a further application to the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS), but I have not found the process easy.

108. My EIBSS application has been refused and I am currently appealing their decision.

109. I requested my medical records in around 2005 in support of my Skipton Fund application, whereby I paid £14 to obtain my records and I waited a very long time for them to be sent. They said that the payment had apparently disappeared. This original cheque was never cashed and it never materialised. I rewrote and submitted a fresh cheque which I took to them personally, as well as sending the request for the medical documents via Recorded Delivery, and so that way I had proof that they had received it. The medical documents came with blacked out, redacted text. No-one could get to the bottom of it.

110. John Duncan & Co Solicitors looked into the medical records issue for me in connection with my industrial compensation claim, but the solicitor said that he was just hitting a brick wall. I even went to my local MP Ian Mearns, to try to find out why my notes were blacked out, although I didn't get to see him in person.

111. It took 6 years for the accident compensation claim to be settled. As mentioned previously, I had arranged for a solicitor to fight the case for me. The relevant government department (I think it was the DHSS) arranged for me to have a medical and it was agreed at that medical that the damage to my foot stopped me from being able to work. However, my solicitor informed me I couldn't use any of the documents in my fight for compensation going back to1992. They quoted the Official Secrets Act and said that they could not take it any further. They said they were unable to use the documents under the Official Secrets Act anyway as the DHSS have their own specialists to assess my medical health. They said that there were certain things that they couldn't disclose to me although we did inquire about it.

112. I now have, what I have been told, are my medical records. I am absolutely convinced that this version of my records does not include everything and may well have been tampered with, as the first version that I received in 2005 (when I requested them for the Skipton Fund) had many

more pages of blacked-out text. However, these pages are not included in my 'new' version of 2022.

113. As stated earlier in my statement, a date of 24 July 1992 is mentioned in my medical records but this is incorrect, as it should have been 04 August 1988 when I lost my 2 toes. This incorrect recording of the date resulted in a costly error for me in terms of financial compensation.

## Section 8. Other Issues

114. In light of the fact that a Public Inquiry has now been established it is good to know that I was correct in my thinking for all those years. I was made to feel that I had done something that I shouldn't have, or that I had been misinforming people. My wife was younger than 18 when she met me, and she says that she knew of my past and we know how we have lived our lives. We have never taken drugs and therefore never shared needles. We have always been very close and done everything together. We have just accepted everything and have accepted what we were told.

115. It is reassuring that people are now listening regarding the infected blood scandal.

116. I find it difficult to accept that the onus is on me to prove that I was given contaminated blood, when the only evidence available is what has been provided from the hospitals involved.

## Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 2 FEBRUARY 2023