

Witness Name: SUZANNE ARCHER

Statement No: WITN1417001

Exhibits: WITN1417002

Dated: MAY 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

---

### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SUZANNE ARCHER

---

I, SUZANNE ARCHER, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Suzanne Archer. I was born on [GRO-C] 1969 and I live at [GRO-C]  
[GRO-C] Bristol [GRO-C].
2. My father, Thomas Bowen (born [GRO-C] 1938), was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) from a transfusion with contaminated blood. He died from liver cancer on [GRO-C] 2003, aged 65.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my father's medical records.

#### Section 2. How Affected

4. My father had a motorcycle accident on the 23rd February 1978 and was given a blood transfusion at the Frenchay Hospital, Bristol. My father was

infected with HCV as a result of being given contaminated blood during that transfusion.

5. We only found out that my father had HCV after he died and after my father's post mortem. I learned that my father had HCV when I contacted the Coroner by telephone to find out why our local funeral directors were treating my father as an infection risk. My father never knew that he was infected with HCV.
6. When my father was close to death, his body was ravaged by cancer and he made us promise that we would not go to see him after he died. When he died we knew he would fit the suit he wore on his wedding day and wanted him to be buried in it. We asked my mother's brother (Uncle Bill) to take it up to the funeral directors for us. I called ahead to let them know my Uncle Bill was coming. I was only then informed that my father's body had been taken to Westbury (north of Bristol) and was in a closed casket that could not be opened due to infection risk. We were totally unaware that my father was in the north of Bristol as we had request for him to be just down the road from where my mum lived, so we believed he was local to us. I rang the Coroner and was told that my father had "Hepatitis C". I was told that my father was not contagious and that they (the funeral directors) were wrong (to insist on a closed casket and in removing him to their Westbury location). The news that my father had HCV and the way in which we were told came as a shock to me (and to my two brothers, Andrew and David). My father had just died and we were in distress. Moreover, the phone calls were made within ear shot of my mother who was asking what was going on. I wanted to protect her and so I kept it from her.
7. A short time after the funeral, my GP contacted us to go in to the surgery for blood tests. I then had to inform my grieving mother why the blood tests were needed. We started looking into HCV ourselves and discovered it could be transferred by blood and bodily fluids. 

GRO-C

GRO-C

GRO-C

.

8. My father should have been informed that he was at risk of HCV as soon after the blood transfusion as possible. My father was completely unaware of any risk to him of infection and was deprived of the opportunity to seek HCV treatment. He should have been informed that he was at risk of HCV through the blood transfusion and tested for it.
9. It would have destroyed my father had he known that he had (inadvertently) placed us in danger. I was just 9 years old when my father had his accident and was given the blood transfusion. I remember that we, as a family, shared things with each other placing us at risk of cross infection i.e. sharing food, drink and attending to each others medical bleeds. GRO-C  
GRO-C. My father used to visit his dentist for treatment, placing his dentist at risk of infection. Moreover my father could have volunteered as a blood donor because he had no idea he was infected.

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

10. I am unable to comment as to whether my father received any other infection than HCV as his medical notes and records have been destroyed.

### **Section 4. Consent**

11. I am unable to comment as to whether my father was treated or tested without knowledge and consent because his medical notes and records have been destroyed.

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

12. My father was, by occupation, an electrician. He was a hard working, determined and stoic man. He (and we) had no idea that anything was wrong until 2002 (24 years after the blood transfusion). Whilst on a family holiday in Florida, my father started complaining of severe back pain. We then went to Majorca and he was fatigued all the time and suffered from stomach pains. He went to the doctors when we returned and they thought he had picked up a

stomach bug. When he did not feel any better he returned to the doctors and saw a locum doctor who noticed he was yellow so he sent my father for blood tests and an ultrasound scan. After the ultra sound my father was sent for a liver biopsy.

13. My mother and I went to the GP on my father's behalf to collect his test results. My father was working on late shift and wasn't around at that time. The GP wanted to discuss the results straight away and told my mother and I that my father had liver cancer (as a primary cancer which we now know had been caused by cirrhosis from HCV). Aside from the huge shock, I remember being puzzled that my father's liver cancer was not a secondary form of cancer. We had no idea that my father had HCV. My father took care of himself. He was a non-smoker who rarely drank. He ate breakfast, took vitamins and cod liver oil and cycled everywhere. If he learned something was bad for you, like sugar, he would stop using it (in his tea).
14. In or around 2000/2001 I noticed a dramatic change in my father's behaviour and personality. He was ordinarily a mellow, kind and level headed man. He was never difficult or argumentative but he did become paranoid and suspicious. He was confused and difficult to reason with because he was over analysing everything. In retrospect I believe the change in my father's personality and his confusion to relate to HCV and the resulting liver disease. My father and I had a very strong father/daughter bond but the change in my father's personality from around that time hastened my leaving home to live with my boyfriend (now my husband).
15. When we were told that my father had cancer, my mother could not bring herself to tell him the news and I had to break it to him myself. It was the hardest thing that I have ever had to do. I told him that the GP was referring him to the Royal Marsden Hospital for treatment. He just said "We will give it a go love". I got engaged to marry in October 2002. I told my father that we had set a date in July 2003 and that he was going to get well and give me away. I wanted him to remain positive and determined to get through it. The

year 2003 was due to be a big year for our family. I was getting married, my father was turning 65 and my mother would be 60. My parents were due to celebrate a big wedding anniversary.

16. Given that my father's cancer was primary we thought we could fight it. We went to the Royal Marsden Hospital and they did tests to see if my father was a suitable candidate for cancer drug trials. He was told that he could not take part in the drug trial because he was not a suitable candidate. I also remember my father had to stay in hospital longer than expected after a liver biopsy because his blood was not clotting properly. My father started his first course of chemotherapy in November 2002 and it destroyed him. The weight fell off him. It was awful. I would go to collect him after a round of treatment and he would just cry. It was so unlike him to cry. We could do nothing for him but watch him die.
17. There was a period of around three weeks after each chemotherapy during which he had to stay at home and others had to stay away because of his low immune system. I remember my father becoming distressed that he would leave the house in a state of disrepair when he died.
18. He was too ill to attend my engagement party. I tried to encourage my father to keep fighting. I managed to persuade him to come with me to see the wedding venue and he cried. He just said "I am not going to be here love". My father was very brave. He was determined to reach his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday so that my mother was not deprived of his pension. His birthday was on GRO-C GRO-C and he passed away on the GRO-C My father worried my mother would be left financially insecure and therefore was determined to hold on for as long as he could.
19. My father died at home. I stayed with him at night (as it was too much for my mother). We were so close. He kept his dignity to the end, with us helping him to and from the bathroom. The nurse came and said they wanted to put a line in and I asked if we could have just one more night and she agreed. The next morning we were told it would be my father's last.

20. The day my father died, my mother lost her soul mate and we lost a much loved father. We are a close family. My father loved family time. We had so much we were going to do and celebrate together. It was all shattered for him. I cried on the morning of my wedding. I told my mother I did not want to get married because my father wasn't there. The wedding was not how it should have been. I had been dealing with my father's illness whilst trying to plan a wedding, which was not the enjoyable experience it should have been. My father never met any of his grandchildren. I am the mother of one and my brother has two. I became pregnant first (in 2005) and my son, Charlie, was my own mother's life saver after my mother lost my father.

21. My father's family are from Liverpool and we scattered my father's ashes there. Charlie has also been affected by my father's death. He has a soft heart and likes to watch the video I have with his Grandad in it. He wanted to leave a locket for him on the Liverpool Dockside Railings when we visited there. I had to tell the school when the news of the Inquiry became public knowledge and the school have informed me that Charlie has spoken about Grandad's 'bad blood'.

22. My father (being unaware that he had HCV) had no idea that he was entitled to the Skipton Fund payments. My father was the breadwinner of the family. He worried about keeping a roof over our heads and over my mother's head after we left home. My mother relied on my father's financial support and she suffered financial hardship after he died. I gave my mother money every month to help her. The system let my father down. Had he received the Skipton Fund money whilst alive he would not have had to worry.

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

23. My father was not given the option of a liver transplant.

24. I was not offered counselling after I lost my father. I suffer with depression and have been prescribed antidepressants. If we had been provided with a

support package we would have known about the Skipton Fund payments sooner.

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

25. I refer to **Exhibit WITN1417002** being copies of some of the documentation sent to the Skipton Fund when we applied for the funding Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments in April/May 2011. The Appeal document explains the circumstances and drawn out process I had to go through to prove that the blood transfusion had in fact taken place. I was eventually successful in obtaining the Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments for my mother but was not told that my mother was in fact entitled to more to include winter fuel allowance (which she only recently started to receive).
26. My mother was initially debarred from claiming the Skipton Fund Stage 1 and Stage 2 payments (in 2003) because of the cut off deadline date. Apparently my father had 'lived too long' (three to four months). I was dismayed that because my father fought for his life that my mother was not entitled to anything. It felt to me that my father was being ridiculed for fighting for his life.
27. I made enquiries about GP, hospital and blood transfusion records as soon as the government changed the cut off date for claiming. I was told by email on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2011 by the Head of Governance at the Frenchay Hospital Medical Records Department that my father's records had been destroyed (earlier than the apparent 8 year policy to keep records before destruction of that Trust). The Skipton Trust appeal process was so stressful I nearly abandoned it. The income payments should have been backdated to when they should have been informed that my father had contracted HCV. My father worked hard all his life and did not deserve this.
28. Even now it is complicated getting my mother's payments for her. My mother is 76 years old. She does not have a computer and EIBSS have asked her to download and complete an application form. They have also asked my

mother to fill out applications and send my father's death certificate on many occasions. The Skipton Fund should have provided EIBSS with these documents.

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

29. I am seeking answers as to why this has happened. I cannot help but think that patients were knowingly transfused with bad blood, used as guinea pigs to see how long they would live for without knowing? If the risk was unknown at the time, I do not understand why patients given blood transfusions were left without any screening after the risk became known. People are still dying now. Was it a cost cutting exercise?

#### **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

30. I am not seeking anonymity and I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry. I would like to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

#### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed.....

GRO-C

.....

Dated 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019.