Witness: John Leslie Cobbledick
Statement No.: **WITN2104001**
Exhibits: **NONE**
Dated: Thursday 8th November 2018

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOHN LESLIE COBBLEDICK

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 8th November 2018. I adopt the paragraph number in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I John Leslie Cobbledick, will say as follows:

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is John Leslie Cobbledick. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1946. My address is known to the Inquiry. I am currently widowed. I have been retired since 1993 and I worked up until then as a Supervisor with the Pentlands Ranger Service. I now live alone. I intend to speak about Corrine Cobbledick's infection of HIV and hepatitis C which she contracted through a blood transfusion in 1984. In particular, the nature of her illness and how both infections affected the treatment she received, up until the point of her death on the 8th April 1995 and the impact it had on our family.

Section 2. How Affected

2. Corrine had an ectopic pregnancy. She lost a lot of blood and the doctors had to give her a transfusion of four units of blood to help her. This transfusion took place at Bangor Hospital, Livingston which is now no longer in existence. Two of these units were infected. This took place in January 1984. Corrine wasn't told that she had contracted HIV until two years later. Before this she was a very healthy person. The infected units had come from an American Prisoner. It was her GP based at Craigshill Health Centre, The Mall, Craigshill, Livingston that did the blood test. I understand that the test he conducted was an HIV test. He would not give her the results of the test and advised her to wait until she had her hospital appointment to discuss the results. I do not know the name of the doctor who spoke with her. Dr Beretal was main treating doctor at City Hospital, Edinburgh, which is now closed. This hospital was based at Greenbank in Edinburgh. After she was diagnosed and had treatment, he was the main doctor. She would attend the City Hospital 1-2 times a week up until the time of her death. She was then told she had hepatitis C in June 1994. I do not know why it took so long to find out she had been infected. I would like to know why there was a delay and what caused the delay in diagnoses. I would like it noted that I have never been tested for hepatitis C to date.

3. Corrine attended City Hospital, who advised her that she was infected with HIV. This was in 1986. Through conversations with her GP, Corrine was told by her GP that two of the units of blood that she had received in 1984 were infected and it had come from an American Prisoner. She was never given any information about why there had been such a delay in telling her she had been infected. When she was diagnosed, there was no further information provided to Corrine at this point other than to take precautions to limit the risk of spreading the infection. Back then, the doctors did not know much about the disease so we weren't told very much. She was told practical information about what treatment she would get, nothing further.

4. There was not enough information given about the illness or the treatment. The hospital should have given her more detail about what happened in her case, the just focused on the basics. The hospital swore blind that they didn't know it was infected blood and that they didn't test the blood until later on, but I would like more information on whether this is correct. My answer to that is, if the hospitals did not know, if the pharmaceutical companies did not know, surely the prison service knew that the American prisoner was infected when he provided the blood. Why was the prison service allowed to sell the blood to the blood banks?

5. I consider that information being given to us would have made a difference. It would not have made a difference to her diagnosis and eventual dying but at least we would have had the full information. It is like getting blood from a stone trying to get full information from these institutions. She should have been told much earlier.

6. It was a shock when she was advised that she was infected. I am unsure how to answer this, it was incredibly difficult. HIV back then was in the media a lot, so we knew the risks that it posed but only because of the media. That is where we got our information. We kept it a secret for years because of the stigma.

Section 3. Other Infections

7. Some of the drugs that Corrine had to take to treat the HIV had very bad side effects. She was very poorly. I remember on one occasion, later on in 1994, I had gone away to visit family members and I had to go back because she had been taken to hospital. When I arrived at the City Hospital, Greenbank, Edinburgh she was stone cold and wrapped up in foil. I didn't think she was going to pull through. She did survive though. She stayed in hospital for one week that time. This took place about 6 or 7 months before her death. Due to the drugs she took, she was always prone to flu and colds. As the years went on she became weaker and weaker. She went from being a size 16 to under 7 stone when she died, on the 8th April 1995.

Section 4. Consent

8. Other than the GP test for HIV, I still believe that Corrine wasn't tested or treated without her knowledge. The doctor did explain why she was being given a particular drug for her HIV. They were all trial drugs back then so people were not sure at that point what the outcome would be for a person taking them.

9. I don't think that Corrine was tested or treated without her consent.

10. I don't think that Corrine was tested or treated without being given adequate or full information. The City Hospital, Edinburgh was very good.

11. I think that Corrine may have been tested or treated for the purposes of research. Due to the amount of drugs that she had to take I would say possibly she was used for research. I don't know the different trials of drugs but maybe she was being used in a trial that she and I wasn't

told about it. The doctors did keep changing her drugs and trying different combinations to see what would work for her. Once Corrine passed away, she had requested that her organs be used for research. Dr Breatlee knew about this and was present at the time of her death.

Section 5. Impact

12. The mental and physical effects of being infected were terrible. I would worry every day about how she was mentally and physically. Her life was not her own. We both worried everyday about what was going to happen and when it would happen. She used to play darts for Scotland and then when she was diagnosed, she just stopped and never returned to it. She was a wreck. There was a mental toll on both of us. We were telling a lie all the time to people around us as we did not want anyone to find out about her diagnosis. We didn't want to tell the children. We didn't want them going to school with everyone knowing. Back then the stigma was a lot worse than it is today. For Corrine, getting out of bed in the morning was a nightmare, trying to get to the doctor was a nightmare, the longer time went on, the worst it got. I had a good job in Edinburgh and I would worry every day about her when I went to work. It was just a nightmare living through this. There is no other word for it.

13. Corrine had many medical complications as a result of the illness. Tiredness, drastic loss of weight, being sick and she was experiencing diarrhoea all the time. We found it hard to discuss the illness with each other. There was no answer, no solution, so it felt like well what can we do? We would hope for the best all the time. She was also fed through a tube in her stomach. One time when we were away on holiday in our caravan and I was unable to get the fluid into the tube, we had to go into the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and after their investigations they found that there was a knot in the tube, it was awful. She lost her mind in the end. She was a very active person, she was always cleaning and playing darts but all that stopped and she became very depressed. She was mentally very impacted.

14. Over the course of her illness she was a very sick person. She was always tired and she could only sit in the house. She had no life. She was having nightmares all the time. Day to day it was a nightmare. All she could do was watch TV. I had a conservatory built on the end of the house. She loved that and she would sleep in the conservatory. She had become very depressed and this did help a bit with her mental health. I remember when her hair fell out, we had to get her fitted for wigs. That depressed her a lot. She passed away in April 1995.

15. I can't remember a lot of the details about her treatment. It was so long ago now. She had haemoglobin treatment and she took a lot of painkillers. My son Ian Cobbledick has details on the drugs and treatments that Corrine underwent.

16. Corrine did not face any obstacles in accessing treatment for her illness. The doctors and nurses in Edinburgh were fantastic with her.

17. She received all the drugs for HIV that were available at the time, however she died because she did not receive the hepatitis C drugs that she should have. They were unavailable. I cannot recall the details of this now though it has been a long time ago. My son Ian Cobbledick may be able to assist with this.

18. Tiredness and depression were the main mental effects. She didn't want to get out of bed. She wouldn't look into the mirror. I can't answer more in detail now because I cannot recall now. It wasn't easy for her, there were always a lot of side effects.

19. When she did things like go to the dentist, everything was covered up. It was done to make you feel, like you had a disease. She felt terrible, different to everyone else. One dentist wouldn't even treat her. She had to go to the dental hospital in Livingston instead. She had cancer as well which required an operation on her neck. The doctors refused to use an anaesthetic on her for this. The reasoning behind this was that the doctors and nurses would have to use needles to administer the anaesthetic which would lead to bleeding. On that basis they refused because there would be at risk that they would have a direct contact with the blood. She had to go through that operation with no anaesthetic. When she was in hospital during this time, a young nurse came to see her, to assist her. Corrine said to her that she had HIV and the nurse ran down the ward screaming. She was then moved to a single room, away from everyone else. The impact on Corrine was dreadful. That was in 1993 when that happened to her.

We were living a lie. Not a lot of people knew about her diagnosis. Some close family and friends did know but mainly we kept it quiet for the children's sake. We were frightened they would be bullied. The stigma back then was a lot worse than now. We told people she had cancer. She did have cancer later on but we told people this all the way through. When it did come out, a long time ago, I used to do part time work at a garage. I remember turning up one day to work and the owner of the garage saying "*Sorry John you can't work here anymore*". It was because, he had assumed that because Corrine had HIV that I would have it too and that I was a danger.

Someone once said to me "*At least the blood transfusion gave your wife another 10 years*". I could have smacked that person when they said that. If she hadn't had the blood she would be alive now. The day she had the ectopic pregnancy there were 3 doctors that saw her that day. The 1st in the morning, the 2nd in the afternoon and the 3rd at night. That whole day she kept calling the doctor out and they kept telling her to rest. She was not admitted until the night time by which point she needed to have the transfusion. I think there is fault there as well. Corrine disagreed with this. She didn't blame the doctors for what happened to her but I do and I am still angry. You would think that one of the 3 doctors would have done something earlier.

20. Corrine didn't work. She was unable to. We lied to everyone, we never told the truth of what was wrong with her, so she didn't apply for jobs. I had a good job as a Supervisor for The Pentlands Park Commission. I had 14 men under me. We would manage the ground maintenance. She didn't need to go to work but frankly she was too ill to work. She worked until 1986 as a cleaner and a professional darts player.

21. I was going to work with a fear that I was going to be sacked. I was scared people would find out about her diagnosis and then sack me. My employer in Edinburgh did find out after a day I broke down due to the pressure. It all came out and my boss was very supportive. He wrote a letter to Edinburgh Council, who I was working for explaining my situation. I stopped work in 1993 to look after Corrine. She was very ill at this point so I took early retirement. This was two years before Corrine died and I never worked again. This is the reason we lost our house. I was having to draw on my army pension and my council pension which made our income too high to claim benefits, but at the same time, our income was too low to keep up our mortgage. We spent £30,000 putting in the conservatory for her so she could watch the birds. Then I had to sell the house at a loss. I tried to rent it out and move into a caravan to try and keep afloat, but this did not work out. I ended up going to a loan company and I ultimately could not pay the loan off and lost the lot.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

22. There were never any problems in obtaining treatment or support in relation to Corrine's illness. We used to have a local community nurse who would come to our house twice a week and help us. This nurse would help with Corrine's medication and she would help with Corrine's bath and things like this. Once a week I hired a private cleaner to come to the house and do all the ironing to help me out.

I used to do all the other cleaning and cooking for the household myself. I have never had counselling. It was brought up and I was offered it. I was never interested in counselling at the time. Now it's different, I wish maybe I had at the time. Corrine was the same. We were brought up in a way that meant we solved our own problems. The Macmillan nurses helped a lot when Corrine was diagnosed with cancer.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

23. I think a solicitor in Edinburgh called Brian Donald who fought for compensation for HIV sufferers along with MP Gavin Strang in the early 1990's told us about the Eileen Trust and we contacted the fund. I cannot recall which firm he worked for. No one contacted us.

24. I don't receive anything now, from anyone. We got £300 a month from the Eileen Trust and when Corrine died, I got £100 a month from them. That stopped about 5 or 6 years ago. That was it. The only other money was a lump sum in 1993 for £85,000 for a one off payment. This was the Scottish Government, I think, that gave us this one off payment. I received £20,000 at one point from the Skipton Fund and then a further £30,000 from the Skipton fund 2 years ago. I do not have any further details on the dates for this. My daughter Teresa Cobbledick and my son Ian Cobbledick will know more about this. I find looking at this again incredibly upsetting so I try to keep away from looking at the documents again if I can help.

25. I was earning too much money to apply for financial assistance. I remember I filled in a lot of forms and the forms got sent back and rejected. Corrine and I were entitled to nothing.

26. I was earning too much money to apply for financial assistance from the benefits office. That was the only obstacle for financial assistance. I filled out the benefit forms and I went to the job centre in Livingston to see if they could help me. They took one look at it and said "*Are you joking?*" I paid into my pension for years and it has meant that I was entitled to very little. My army and widow pension meant that I was 20p a week over the earnings threshold to be entitled to benefits.

27. There were no preconditions imposed as I was earning too much money. I suppose that was a precondition.

28. What we received from the Eileen Trust we were thankful for, but it wasn't enough. What can you pay for someone's life? They took away her life. It is definitely not enough and we lost everything.

29. I have received no financial support other than I received from the Eileen Trust when Corrine was alive.

Section 8. Other Issues

30. Corrine had a diary about how she was feeling throughout the years. I will provide this to the Inquiry to give them an insight into how she was feeling.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 25th/JAN.\19.