Witness Name: Robert Fraser
Statement No.: WITN2136001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 12 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ROBERT FRASER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5th November 2018.

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Robert Fraser. My date of birth and address are known to the enquiry. I intend to speak about my blood infection. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it has had on my life.

Section 2. How Infected

2. I was infected with Hepatitis C as the result of a blood transfusion when I was 12 years old. Due to the nature of the incident and the amount of time that has lapsed, I am unable to recall specific dates and the events leading up to the blood transfusion are unclear. I know that I was knocked over by a lorry and I was in critical condition. I was rushed to the Royal Alexandra Hospital where I received a blood transfusion which inevitably led to me contracting Hepatitis C.

3. Whilst my memory of the event is unclear, I do not believe that I was provided with information regarding the risks prior to the blood transfusion. I believe this to be largely due to my age at the time of the accident. I can recall the doctor telling me that I had a rare blood group but I do not recall any other information being given. If information was provided, it would have been issued to my mother however this would have occurred after the transfusion due to the urgency of the situation. My mother is now decease and is unable to clarify what information she was provided with prior to the transfusion. Regardless, I do not believe she would have been provided with adequate information regarding my blood transfusion.

4. I first found out I had hepatitis C in 2001. I attended a blood donation unit with the intention of donating. A few days after, I received a letter asking me to attend the hospital in order to see a blood transfusion specialist. On attending the hospital, I spoke with a doctor named Dr Morris. He informed me that I had hepatitis C. He was a very informative and helpful doctor

who gave me adequate information in order to help me better understand my illness and how I might manage the infection.

Section 3. Other Infections

5. I do not believe I have been infected with anything other than Hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

6. I believe that I have been treated without being given adequate awful information prior to my blood transfusion for the reasons already stated.

Section 5. Impact

7. When I was told I had hepatitis C I was devasted, confused and worried for my future. I had always tried to live a healthy life and I didn't understand how this could of happened. The diagnosis caused me to develop a series of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Once I began treatment in my first treat in 2003/04, which was a drug called Interferon, my depression and anxiety worsened. I also began experiencing terrible side effects such as fatigue, weight loss, insomnia, joint pain and leg pain. I recall itching my legs till they bled. This made daily life almost unbearable and I wouldn't leave the house. I stayed in bed for a year. This placed a great strain on my marriage and my work. I am also of the belief that it caused my mother's death. She felt very guilty and blamed herself.

8. With regards to my work, due to the severity of the side effects I had multiple absences. I therefore informed my employer of my diagnosis and the surrounding circumstances. Nevertheless, they began the termination process, asserting my numerous absences had violated their absence policy. I contacted my union and asked they be present at the final decision meeting. The union advised that my employer had not followed correct procedure as no verbal or written warning had been issued prior to the final decision meeting. Unable to terminate my employment, I was subsequently transferred to a different department. The new department had a high turnover of supervisors and I was faced with explaining my illness to each new supervisor. As word of my illness spread, I gradually became more isolated as people began avoiding me, for instance, they would get out the lift when I got in. I felt my manager deliberately tried to embarrass and humiliate me by taking me to the side to speak with me about my illness in front of others.

9. My absence from work continued and my employer began the termination process once again. I fought my dismissal for 6 years but was eventually fired in 2010. My intention was to take my employer to a tribunal because, whilst they had followed correct procedure unlike last time, my illness was classed as a disability and the standard absence policy should not have been applied. Unfortunately, I was not in a financial position to continue to fight and I was forced to settle out of court. The illness not only impacted my mental health and consequently all my relationships but it affected me financially as well.

10. By the end I had lost faith in people. The experience allowed me to see the very worst in people and I lost the ability to trust. I felt hopeless and this added to my depression which continued to worsen. Going through that experience was one of the hardest times in my life and I continue to fight the pain of that experience daily. My wife suffered greatly. Our relationship became very strained and eventually fell apart. She was carrying the weight of me and my illness as well as attending university and taking care of our son. I believe it eventually became too much for her. It had stolen all the love from our relationship and we divorced one year ago.

11. The best thing to happen to me is my 12-year-old son GRO-C. If it weren't for him, I don't know where I would be. He too has been heavily impacted by my illness. He has been emotionally damaged by watching his mum and dad go through so much. I am very anxious about what might happen if friends at his school found out and what they might say to him or about him as a result. I therefore don't feel I can tell very many people which adds to my feelings of loneliness.

12. I am anxious about individuals from his school finding out due to the stigma attached to the illness. I have experienced the stigma of the illness time and times again. I went from being a very popular, social person inside and outside of work to someone who was avoided. Friends I had known for years stopped coming to the house due to awkwardness and feeling uncomfortable. It has impacted every aspect of my life, for instance my performance at school was significantly affected due to my terrible

memory. It therefore destroyed my education. I believe I am limited in the things I can achieve because I was deprived of a good education at the very start.

13. I began my second treatment in 2010. This was similar to the first treatment but with an added component which increased the chances of success from 45 to 65. I experienced the same side effects as before. I am now classed as clear.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/ Support

14. Whilst I feel my illness has impacted my life extensively I do not feel I have been denied treatment nor have I experienced obstacles in trying to access it. I have spoken with a counsellor about my depression and my experiences regarding my infection. The therapist I was seeing moved and I was told they would be in touch to arrange further appointments with someone else but they never did. I don't feel I have the energy any more to speak with someone about my experiences however.

15. I have attended the Scottish Infected Blood Forum in an effort to deal with my problems and speak with people who are experiencing the same thing as me. As soon as I walked in the door it was like a weight had been lifted. I had felt alone and empty for so long, being in a room with people who knew exactly what I had been through and continue to go through, I believe saved my life.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

16. I was first informed of the possibility of financial assistance by Dr Morris who advised I speak with the Skipton Fund. I was awarded £20,000. The Caxton Foundation also offers financial support. Under the new government scheme I was advised I was not entitled to further financial support as I was classed as stage one. This was reassessed and I was made an aware under the Sottish Government which was back dated to September 2018. I therefore receive **£1575** a month which amounts to £18,900 a year. I have therefore been able to make steps towards reducing my debt which I accrued over the years due to my job instability.

17. I had difficulty in proving that I received a blood transfusion which was problematic when applying for funding. The hospital that I attended destroyed their medical records after 8 years and they only had documentation that showed I was a patient. There was no information regarding the blood transfusion. My mother therefore wrote a letter to the Skipton Board explaining that my medical notes had in fact been destroyed and consequently evidence that I received a blood transfusion.

Section 8: Other Issues

18. I do not have any other issues which I feel are relevant to the Inquiry nor do I possess any evidence that I feel would be relevant to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 1/3/19