Witness Name: Gordon Strang
Statement No.: WITN2272001
Exhibits: NONE
Dated: 8 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GORDON STRANG

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

I, Gordon Strang, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Gordon James Strang. My address is GRO-C, GRO-C, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, GRO-C. I live with my partner Karen Watt and our two children. I have a son who is four years old and a daughter who is 20 months old. I work as a mechanical engineer. I intend to speak about my experience of being infected with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of if my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

2. In 1979, I started suffering from whooping cough at two months old. The bruising on my chest brought a diagnosis of Haemophilia about nine months later. I have mild Haemophilia A. It was at 7.5% but now it is at 12.5%. I only ever needed Factor VIII on an ad hoc basis. I estimate I've had it less than 10 times in my life. I received blood products on a number of occasions in the 1980s and I believe it was during these occasions that I received the infected blood product. In 1981, 8th February I fractured my skull. I was given Factor VIII concentrate at Yorkhill Hospital. On the 11th of February 1985 I fell in the snow and hit my head. I spent 48 hours on the ward at Yorkhill Hospital. On this occasion I was given Factor VIII concentrate twice-daily over a five-day period. I vividly remember this. On 8th March 1988 I had a dental extraction. On this occasion I was given the Factor VIII concentrate at Yorkhill Hospital. However, I presume this was heat treatment? I was then given blood products twice in 1988, once on 28th March due to head injury and also on 24th May due to an injured knee.

3. I have no memory of when me, my mother (Margaret Strang - deceased) and my father Walter Strang were first told I had been infected with hepatitis C. I probably think I was a teenager when I was first told. My medical records have a note of the earliest liver function test in October 1990 in which I was tested for Hepatitis C antibodies. I cannot remember the exact date we were told of my diagnosis. I do remember during the 1990s going to Haemophilia Society events where issues and topics would be discussed. One of these meetings took place in the Glasgow Hilton. I'm guessing Hepatitis C and HIV infections were high on the agenda of these meetings. Clearly as a adolescent child this never truly worried me but the concerns and strain on my parents Margaret and Walter Strang must have been unimaginable. I do recall mention at some of these meetings or maybe

even at medical appointments of the term non-A and non-B hepatitis. I believe this is what Hepatitis C was referred to during the 1980s and 1990s.

Section 3. Other Infections

4. I do not believe that I received any infection or infections other than hepatitis C as a result of being given infected blood product.

Section 4. Consent

5. I do not know if I was tested or received treatment without my knowledge or without my consent.

Section 5. Impact

6. I think about my diagnosis and been infected on a daily basis. I found reading my medical notes and preparing this statement difficult as it opens old wounds and stirs up emotional scars that I've tried to bury. I'm not one who easily discusses my feelings or emotions and I tend to bottle things up and be more inward looking. I find it difficult to quantify easily how having Hepatitis C has impacted my life. I feel I have truly dodged a bullet by not acquiring HIV.

7. In my medical records I found a letter dated 8th October 1986. It was letter to my school addressing staff concerns over HIV virus. It has blown my mind that my teachers approached my GP regarding this. Reading the letter now makes me angry and upset but also retrospectively curious about how it affected my mother. Thinking back to the climate in the 1980s, due to AIDS and the Tombstone adverts, this must have led to severe anxiety for my parents. I had three attempts to clear the virus, 1996 I received interferon treatment after my higher exams during the months of June to September. I received

treatment again in 2009 till August and the treatment finished in July 2010. I had 48 weeks of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment. My last treatment came in January 2016 where I went anti-viral course for 12 weeks. In November 2016 I received the all clear confirmation.

8. Growing up, I can't really remember when I was fully conscious of the fact I had Hepatitis C, possibly during the latter part of secondary school. Even in 1996, during my first treatment, it never seemed to me as a serious thing. I think the seriousness of it was lost on me due to my childhood innocence. I remember it being a bit of a novelty having to inject myself three times a week. I did have the option of treatment earlier in 1996, however I postponed until after my exams and during the summer months in an attempt to lessen the impact on my studies.

9. I remember losing significant weight in the three months I took Interferon for. I started to inject into my fatty tissue around my waist. As time went on I had to move onto my thighs as can I could no longer "pinch an inch" on my stomach.

10. At university I failed fourth year of my Engineering master's degree, primarily due to my lack of application. At the time I never related this to my Hep C infection. Looking back, the fatigue and lack of get up and go I believe can certainly be related to my hepatitis C infection. I would regularly sleep in for morning lectures and I would have a general lethargy and malaise.

11. Post-university I did not immediately seek an engineering career and was happy to remain in the leisure attendant role that I was casual employed in during my time at university.

12. In August 2009 I started my second attempt at treatment but it was awful mentally, physically and emotionally. I made a conscious effort to

continue working and trying keep a lid on my my emotions and attempt to lead a normal life. However, this would spill over when I got home, where I was generally irritable and there would be arguments about the smallest things. This would trigger me into a rage. Initially people give me the benefit of the doubt due to side effects. However 48 weeks is a long time to tolerate. I crawled into a cave and bottled up my feelings waiting for the 48 weeks to pass. My relationships with other people were strained and stressed during this period. My short fused caused yelling and shouting followed by a period of reflecting on what the hell I was thinking of doing. I felt a lack of caring and empathy or want of intimacy during my treatment.

13. I suffered from chronic fatigue had aching bones and generally flu-like symptoms for a 12 month period. Interferon is the chemical your body produces when have the flu and is what causes the flu symptoms. Since my treatment whenever I have the flu, the feeling of the symptoms really haunts me as that is how I felt during treatment. My life was put on hold for 12 months. I never wanted to exert myself, go out socially or do anything that required physical or mental effort. My blood tests during treatment confirmed that I was borderline anaemic with a low red blood cell count for most of my treatment.

14. The smallest task or errand would cause extreme exhaustion and lead to irritability and grumpiness. This had a profound effect my family and friends who would initially put up with the mood swings, but after a while even their tolerance grew thin.

15. At times during my treatment course I'd be very depressed and ruminate on what the point was. No specific suicidal urges or thoughts but certainly verging on the precipice of such thoughts.

16. I had a sort of brain fog which an issue during the treatment and possibly still is to this day. I would describe this brain fog as a sort of

short-term memory loss and general lack of concentration and ease of procrastinating.

17. I lost significant weight as I was on the low end of a healthy BMI scale at around 20.

18. It took me six months post-treatment to truly feel out of the woods of the influence of drugs. It felt like a veil being been lifted from my brain. When I look back on how I functioned and felt during those 18 months, I feel truly robbed of the time when I should have been experiencing things and that I missed out on living life and enjoying myself with family and friends. Unfortunately I had to bury myself away from life to survive the treatment and recover, which makes things worse. However, in the end the treatment was not successful. I look back on those 18 months and feel embarrassed and ashamed of how I behaved and treated those around me.

19. Although my employer was supportive of the treatment, my line manager wasn't very supportive and did not manage me well during my treatment. I bottled up grudges and perceived discrimination. This came to ahead post-treatment but was never adequately settled and discussed in detail. This held me back quite a few years in my career progress at the time.

20. One-month post-treatment I suffered what could be described as mental breakdown. I was not prepared for this. There was no support offered during my treatment on a mention of how people without a mental health issues are not meant to go on it. I did get referred to a psychologist at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary with Karen, my partner.

21. I suffered some physical side effects as well. I have fungal toenails due to the treatment. After the treatment there is also a change in bowel

behaviour and regularity. It has not been identified as being a side-effect by medical professionals however it is very noticeable that I certainly am more gaseous now.

22. I had a full course of treatment in 2016. I went on a course of anti-viral drugs (I cannot remember the name of the drug). I know it was very expensive (around £1000 per tablet). Due to the cost of this the NHS required to fund the costs for everyone who has hepatitis C. I was advised that they prioritise most unhealthy first and then work backwards. I had to wait due to the fact that I was not on the advanced stages of hepatitis C infection.

23. During this treatment I would get a weekly prescription for 12 weeks. There were next to no side-effects and compared to my previous treatment this was walk in the park. In November 2016, I received the all-clear letter.

24. Although I was always told by LFTs are in the normal range, ultrasounds were good and fibroscans were all okay, I still feel like there is a ticking timer hanging over me. Only after the second full treatment, would I question the Haematologist at what point concern would be raised about normal tests. And then from that point how long would I have before deterioration of my health and subsequent liver failure. In essence, I was trying to get an answer to how long I would have left to live once any red flags were evidenced in my tests. Clearly no medical professional can or will want to predict this, so all the answers were very wishy-washy. I'm still sceptical whether I'm fully free of hepatitis C in terms of lasting damage. Clearly my viral load is undetectable but the journey of the attempt to get rid of it still haunts me. My all -clear confirmation wasn't the great celebration that it should have been. I'm still very concerned about what the future holds.

25. I worry about my alcohol consumption during my student career what lasting damage it could have done.

26. The Haemophilia Scotland meeting in 2015 opened my eyes to the effect that Hep C can have on your daily life from hearing the stories of others. I heard how there is no safe drinking level while infected with Hepatitis C and how a fatty liver can also accelerate liver deterioration.

27. I've made a conscious effort to stop drinking except for birthdays, Christmas, holidays, etc. I do feel I have deliberately withdrawn socially from friends and family, as sadly drinking is part and parcel of life nowadays. People question and interrogate you on why you are not drinking and not wanting to tell them the truth can be awkward to the point where I try to avoid engagements around licensed establishments.

28. At the Haemophilia Scotland meeting, one chap was possible taken aback that I was a child treated at Yorkhill Hospital and never contacted HIV. I found this very strange that I appeared to be the exception to the norm, the countless young boys I would have been seen with that are now dead or in poor health is actually quite distressing.

29. The breakdown in relationship with my mother due to what was described as driver rage (side-effect of Riboferon). The irreversible arguments persisted and were never spoken about prior to her own death.

30. Reading my medical notes, I feel deeply troubled when I saw what my mother had to go through. Haemophilia is on my mother's side so I guess she bore the brunt of the concern and worry as I grew up. My father confirmed that she never really spoke about her feelings about these issues over the years.

31. I worry about my life expectancy and what my future holds and if my life will be prematurely cut short due to the existing damage already done.

32. Prior to clearing the virus, I have been very conscious of blood transfers via razors and toothbrushes etc. My partner Karen has been tested several times over our 20 years relationship. I have always been aware of the evidence among monogamous couples that the chances of a transfer of the infection through sex are less than 1%.

33. GRO-C

34. Although now I am clear of the virus, I feel particularly anxious on what the future holds for me in particular, my health and life expectancy. The overarching fear of liver deterioration leading to cirrhosis has passed. I now fret and worry over any health problems or illness. I am concerned if any of them are linked to the years of having hepatitis C or the failed treatments I underwent.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

35. I never have received any counselling or any psychological support outside the period when I had about one month post-treatment breakdown. I think I should have been offered it especially during the second treatment.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

36. I applied to Skipton and received £20,000 which was paid in the early 2000s. I cannot remember the exact year but I invested the payment. I

felt that the application was straightforward once my medical notes and doctor letters were sent to the Fund Administrators.

37. I received a stage two payment of £30,000 in I December 2016 as part of the government's decision to equalise all payments between chronic and advanced liver disease.

38. I registered with SIBBS in 2017 and made an for the ...... payments as recommended by the Scottish Government in 2018. SIBBS payments commenced in December 2018.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. I really find it hard to comprehend how myself, living in Scotland, have better access to financial support that my fellow co-infected with other parts of the UK. I understand that the NHS is a devolved matter, however all parts of the UK surely must be on a level playing field when it comes to financial support and assistance.

40. I struggle with how long it has as taken for the NHS and the government to amend the wrongs of the past. In receiving treatment that was meant to help to prolong my life ended up condemning us to endure a life of misery fighting the infection. The Hippocratic Oath to not do any harm clearly hasn't been maintained in our cases, but whether this deliberate remains to be seen. Hopefully this enquiry should get to the bottom of this and any historical failings identified.

41. The authorities had it in their powers to nip this in the bud years ago and lesson some of the severe trauma and anxiety of the infected and affected by being open and candid about what happened in the 1970s and 80s. Their unwillingness to do this has just snowballed the anger, resentment and ill feeling. The attitude and manner that this inquiry visibily adopted in the opening hearings in July 2018 fills me with hope

that they will leave no stone unturned in this quest for the truth and will hold people and organisations to account.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 4/3/19