Witness Name: Alasdair Wight Cameron
Statement No.: WITN009001
Exhibits: Nil
Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ALASDAIR WIGHT CAMERON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 February 2019.

I, Alasdair Wight Cameron, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Alasdair Wight Cameron. My date of birth is GRO-C 1953 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a retired quantity surveyor. I am married to Sheila Cameron ("Sheila"), a retired Consultant Clinical Scientist in Virology.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus ("HCV"), which I contracted from receiving a blood transfusion of contaminated blood during ileostomy operations on 1 and 8 June 1976. In particular, I intend to speak about the nature of my illness, how it affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my life and lives of those around me.

3. I can confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me in writing my statement. The Inquiry team has explained anonymity and I do not require any information to be kept private.

Section 2. How Infected

4. On 1 June 1976 I underwent an Internal Pouch ileostomy operation at Gartnavel General Hospital, Glasgow. During the operation I received a blood transfusion. The operation was not successful and I had to have corrective surgery in the form of a permanent stoma operation on 8 June of the same year. I remember clearly how I was informed by my surgeon, Dr Peebles-Brown (now deceased), that I received a blood transfusion during my operation. To my knowledge, there were no other witnesses, aside from the nurses present, that can confirm this.

5. There are unfortunately no medical records available from the time of my operation. I am aware from Sheila's line of work that medical records were poorly stored in Scotland in the 1970s, with mould and water damage not being uncommon. The staff in the Gastroenterology department on Level 7 of Gartnavel did unsuccessfully make enquiries in an attempt to discover any medical records from the time and believe they were routinely destroyed after a set period.

6. Because my medical records from 1976 were destroyed. My Consultant, Dr Matt Priest, and GP have both verified that I had to have contracted HCV from a transfusion of contaminated blood.

7. Once I recovered from the operation I continued to live my life as normal, which involved going back to work and playing rugby. I did notice that I was never able to return to my peak fitness from before

the operation, but I just put that down to my recovery from the operation.

8. At the end of 2010 I experienced internal bleeding and it was found I had oesophageal varices. I was immediately referred to a gastroenterologist, where blood samples were taken and sent to a lab for testing.

9. I was in the unique position of being married to a virologist. Sheila worked at the lab where my tests were submitted and she processed my blood samples. Sheila was actually the one who first notified me of my positive HCV status; she told me as soon as she became aware of the result.

10. In August 2011 I was formally diagnosed with HCV. My GP provided me with full and adequate information to help me understand and manage my HCV infection. I did not have to press for information. I do not consider there to have been information that ought to have been provided to me sooner than it did.

11. Sheila attended this initial appointment with me and we were also given information making us aware of the risks of spreading the infection, but Sheila knew much about this already, given her job. GRO-C
GRO-C

Section 3. Other Infections

12. To the best of my knowledge, I have not contracted any other infections besides HCV from infected blood or blood products. I was tested for HIV with the result coming back as negative.

Section 4. Consent

13. The operation I underwent in 1976 was a life-saving operation. I accept that the blood transfusion was administered in my best interest at the time.

14. To the best of my knowledge I believe I have always been treated or tested with my knowledge and consent, and have been given adequate or full information. As far as I am aware, I was never tested or treated for the purposes of research.

15. I would never have any other tests unbeknownst to me without my approval and signature.

Section 5. Impact

16. When I learnt of my infection with HCV I was devastated. It was not the sort of illness I ever expected to get. I did not fit the stereotype of someone with HCV at all. The doctor had a lot of questions for me about my lifestyle.

17. HCV testing was part of the investigation of oesophageal varices. The connection between HCV and the blood transfusions was made soon after I was diagnosed. My only risk factor for HCV was a blood transfusion at the time of the operations.

Treatment and physical impact

18. With hindsight, I started to notice the physical effects of the infection from 1976 onwards with fatigue and not being able to reach the same level of fitness as prior to my operation. I had no idea it was because I had HCV.

19. At the start of September 2011 I discussed various ways forward in terms of treatment with my doctor. Around this time labs had developed the ability to categorise HCV into sub-types. I was found to

be sub-type 3, for which a new treatment had just become available. I was subsequently moved high up the waiting list for this treatment.

20. In October 2011 I commenced my first treatment of a 48-week course of Interferon and Ribavirin. At the end of this course I tested negative for HCV and was considered clear. 6 months later, however, at my final check it had returned.

21. The first round of the first course of treatment took a great toll on my health for a few days. I suffered constant nausea and I was worried that these effects would carry on for the whole 48 weeks. Luckily these side effects did not last for the whole treatment period.

22. 18 months after my first round of treatment, there had been more pharmaceutical development. Triple therapy, a combination of Ribavirin, Interferon and Sofosbovir, was offered to me. This round of treatment was successful and I have been clear of HCV for 4 years now.

23. I still am checked every 6 months with an ultra sound to see if the HCV damage to the liver has progressed. Annually I endure an endoscopy to ensure no recurrence of the varices and twice annual blood tests to check liver function

24. Because it took so long for my HCV status to be discovered, I have cirrhosis of the liver.

25. On 12 August 2011 I was diagnosed with Diabetes; this was around the same time I was diagnosed with HCV. I understand that HCV has an impact on the pancreas, so I believe the two illnesses to be correlated. Managing my diabetes alongside undergoing treatment for HCV was difficult and taxing.

<u>Mental impact</u>

26. Thankfully, I did not suffer any major psychological effects from the treatment. I have always maintained that positivity is the way forward through life's challenges. It does not pay to dwell on unfortunate events when there is nothing you could have done differently about it, as that will only make you sad and depressed.

Family, work, financial and social impact

27. I have not witnessed a negative impact caused by my health on Sheila and I know that she also believes there to have been no major impact on her over the years. We have both learned to live with my medical issues and not let them dominate our lives.

28. Due to her line of work, Sheila was aware of the issues with blood transfusions and blood products. Sheila was initially upset that she had not thought to get me tested for HCV much sooner, but it is of course not her fault.

29. I retired from work in May 2011. I guess I was fortunate that I was diagnosed with HCV once I was no longer working, as I did not have to take time off for treatment and there was no effect on career progression or vocational training. Although, I would say the infection, the subsequent cirrhosis and further health complications have impacted on the enjoyment of my retirement.

30. I was required to make adjustments in my personal life due to the treatment: in particular my Wednesday nights for a year and a half were spent self injecting Interferon and I have had frequent hospital and GP appointments and check-ups ever since.

31. Sheila and I worked hard to ensure we would be financially secure in our retirement and we have fortunately not suffered any financial impact from my infection.

32. My health has had an impact on my social life to an extent. I am severely restricted in how much alcohol I am permitted; so I no longer enjoy going out for a pint or a meal with friends.

33. Despite my illness I have been able to continue leading a relatively normal life. During my first round of treatment I purchased a traveling fridge to store and bring Interferon with me on holiday. At one point, when my fridge had malfunctioned, I had to ask hotel staff to store the medication in their kitchen fridge for the day, but they didn't make a fuss about it.

Stigma

34. Early on, I decided to only disclose my HCV status to friends and family on a need to know basis. Initially, only my sister and a friend of Sheila's were told of my diagnosis. My experience has been that when you tell friends and family about illnesses they tend to treat you like a patient. I would rather enjoy my interactions with the important people in my life and not be asked 'how are you feeling' every time I see someone.

35. I always disclosed my HCV status to medical professionals and dentists as required. I never faced any stigma from this, although it has always been frustrating to face a slew of questions every time I have to explain my lengthy medical history. This happens every time I go for an endoscopy appointment etc.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

36. I have not faced any difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment, care and support in consequence of being infected with HCV.

37. In the past I have wondered why I wasn't captured by a look-back exercise, and therefore diagnosed earlier, but I think my operation was earlier than the period focused on by the hospitals.

38. I received excellent treatment from all of the medical professionals I saw before, during and after my treatment.

39. Counselling and psychological support was made available to me but I did not opt for any of these. My approach has always been to move on with life and not look back.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

40. I successfully applied for financial relief from the Skipton Fund, receiving an initial lump sum payment of £20,000 (Stage 1). I also received a Stage 2 payment of £50,000. I continue to receive monthly payments amounting to £27,000 per year.

41. My Gastroenterology consultant and staff provided me with the forms and helped me fill them in. As discussed at paragraph 5, my Consultant (Dr Matt Priest), and GP have both verified that I had to have contracted HCV from a transfusion of contaminated blood.

Section 8. Other Issues

42. There are no other issues I would like to give evidence on.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 20th May 2019