

Witness Name: Nicholas Ralph Best

Statement No: WITN0187001

Exhibits: **WITN0187002-3**

Dated: 12/06/2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS RALPH BEST

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 19 March 2019.

I, Nicholas Ralph Best, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Nicholas Ralph Best. My date of birth is GRO-C 1948 and my address is GRO-C, Wales. GRO-C.
2. I am retired, and have been unable to work since being diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia and Hepatitis C. I now live alone with the support of my close family.
3. I am not legally represented and am content for the Inquiry team to assist me with my statement.
4. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness has affected

me, the treatment received and the impact it has had on me, my family and our lives together. I have been married twice and have two sons who I am very close to.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was infected with Hepatitis C as a result of receiving blood transfusions. In 1987, I was admitted to University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, where I was treated for Acute Myeloid Leukaemia ('AML'). I was treated in hospital for over a year, and possibly longer, during which I received excellent care for my leukaemia. During the course of this treatment, I received approximately four or five blood transfusions.
6. I cannot remember how or why I was tested for Hepatitis C, it must have been a routine follow up to my Leukaemia sometime in the early 1990's. Suffice to say I was diagnosed and commenced the Interferon treatment. Dr Alan Jones had to fight to get the funding for this and it took a few years, I think he paid half. The treatment lasted for 12 months, but it didn't work. I didn't know this for several years. In 2016 I was tested again when I went into hospital for a hernia examination. To my dismay I still had the infection.
7. This was almost 23 years later; I was due to have an operation on a hiatus hernia at Llandough Hospital. Having had blood tests there, I was told that I was still Hepatitis C positive.
8. My infection was confirmed in a letter dated 10th November 2016, from the University Hospital of Wales, Blood Borne Virus Clinic (BBV). The letter states: *Re Nicholas Best. I can confirm that Mr Best's Hepatitis C virus was confirmed by PCR on 14th April 2016 with a viral load of 3899589.00IU/ml. His genotype was confirmed as 1b. Signed Dr Owen Seddon. Specialist Registrar in Infectious Diseases.* I produce a photograph copy of this letter as **Exhibit WITN0187002**. I was infected

for another 23 years or so before this virus was eradicated on the second attempt.

9. Back in the early 1990's nothing was said to me about the risks of being infected with any viruses through blood transfusions. Upon being told of my infection, I was given very little advice about the Hepatitis C virus itself and how to manage it. I received no advice in relation to cuts and contact through blood, no advice in relation to sexual transmission, and no guide or booklet on managing the infection. I simply received the letter. This was the same for the diagnosis in 2016, no advice or guidance was provided to me

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I do not believe that I have received any infections other than Hepatitis C as a result of receiving infected blood. As far as I am aware I have never been tested for anything else. I certainly have never been told I've been tested for other viruses.

Section 4. Consent

11. I gave consent to all my treatments, that said I was unaware the hospital were testing me for Hepatitis C both in the 1990's and in 2016.
12. Had I known that the blood used for transfusions was infected, I of course would not have consented to receiving the blood for the treatment of my leukaemia.

Section 5. Impact

13. My overall lack of good health has had a severe and irreversible impact on my quality of life, as well as on my two sons and wider family. My illness and infection caused a lot of worry to the whole family; it certainly impacted on the family fruit business.
14. Before suffering from Leukaemia and being infected with Hepatitis C, I had a wonderful family upbringing with my father, mother, and two sisters. My father ran a fruit business, which branched out to include flower shops as well. Upon leaving school, I carried on the family business with my father at his bequest. Thanks to my father the family business was very successful.
15. Prior to becoming ill, our family was on top of the world, and my father's hard-working nature was a true inspiration to me. We were a sociable family, our family home always had lots of visitors, and Christmas was a highly convivial time for us all. I was married to my first wife, and had two sons, Henry and William. I had no concerns financially or otherwise.
16. In 1987, aged about 39, my life was about to take a huge turn for the worse. I had a flu jab at my local GP, following which I became very ill that evening. I had severe sweats and a high temperature. The next morning, my father took me to hospital, and I was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia. I was admitted to the isolation ward at University of Wales Hospital for over a year. Whilst I was still in hospital recovering my first wife left me. This was devastating to me.
17. Prior to my illness, I was a fit and healthy man, and had played second-row for my local rugby team. GRO-C donated bone marrow to help with my leukaemia treatment. It was during this time I received the infected blood transfusions. I do not have any of my medical records but am quite content for the inquiry to contact my GP if they

wish to see them and it would assist. Dr Morgan, Church Road New Quay practice.

18. Upon leaving the hospital, I weighed seven and a half stone, approximately half of my weight prior to being admitted. I left in a wheelchair and was very weak and little did I know, was also infected with the Hepatitis C virus. How this affected my recovery will never be fully known.
19. Subsequently, I was unable to work, and was reliant wholly on my father's and other family members support and financial assistance to help myself and my sons.
20. I do not believe that I have ever recovered from the treatment I endured whilst at the hospital; the trauma has had a profound effect on me to this day.
21. Throughout this period, I was depressed, and suffered from fatigue and immobility. I struggled to walk due to a fused ankle incurred as a result of a complication in hospital with a drip. My sister would often pick me up and transport me so I could be with family and friends.
22. Having recovered from leukaemia, and having endured serious and often painful treatment, I was then diagnosed with Hepatitis C. This was devastating for me, and had a further negative impact on my depression and mental health. I feel very let down to have been infected with contaminated blood, as I was very happy with, and grateful for, the treatment I received from Dr Poyton and others at the University of Wales Hospital for my Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.
23. Even now it is very difficult for me to identify whether it was the AML or the Hepatitis C, which was making me feel so tired and lethargic, maybe a combination of both, who knows.

24. I feel I am old before my time. The Hepatitis has been in my blood for nearly 30 years. I have no idea of the overall damage that has caused to me and I am concerned about that, it is another worry. Also, I was quite a young man when I was infected, without even knowing, I could have inadvertently infected my partners or anyone who I was close to, this is terrible and doesn't really bare thinking about.
25. Sometime in the early 1990's I was treated with Interferon for my Hepatitis C infection. Initially, my mental health improved as I believed that it would clear the infection. Physically, I was very tired, suffered from very severe night sweats, and often had itchy skin. I received Interferon injections once daily for a year. A nurse at a surgery called Llwyellyn administered this. {Park Road Whitchurch in Cardiff} I have great anxiety about attending hospitals and surgeries due to my previous experiences.
26. I was not told whether my Interferon treatment had been successful until I went for a check-up on my hernia in 2016. I was then shocked to hear that the virus was still active, and that the Interferon given to me in the 1990's had not cleared the infection.
27. In 2016 I then received further treatment for Hepatitis C in the form of tablets. I do not recall what these tablets were called. I did not suffer any significant side effects as a consequence of this treatment. I cannot remember the tablets I was prescribed.
28. I am now clear of the Hepatitis C virus following this treatment. Again I am really sorry I cannot remember who told me or when I was in the clear. My memory is not good regarding this; I tend to forget the things that have caused me stress and anxiety.
29. Since my Hepatitis diagnosis I have had a liver biopsy that shows I have scarring of the liver. I drink only very moderately, and the damage

can only be because of my Hepatitis C infection. I do not know the long-term health effects this has caused to my liver.

30. Looking back, I had surgery on a heart valve in July 2017, which was performed at University of Wales Hospital by Dr U Von Oppell. This issue is now resolved and well. It would make sense that by this date my Hepatitis C infection had been cleared, that said I can only surmise that this is the case.

31. As a consequence of my Hepatitis C infection and other health problems, I have a much worse quality of life than I feel I ought to have. Having beaten leukaemia, I was devastated to be told of my Hepatitis C infection as a result of receiving infected blood. I am now low on confidence, and suffer with depression and low energy levels. I have anxiety when driving, and am embarrassed that I am unable to do as much as friends my age are able to.

32. I am angry and frustrated at the effects of my Hepatitis C infection, which I feel has had a detrimental effect on my quality of living. When I compare this to my father's drive and hard-working nature, I am both sad and angry at to what has happened to me.

33. I believe that my health problems deriving from Hepatitis C and other illnesses contributed to the breakdown of my second marriage. I now live alone and am reliant on the support of my two sons and sisters, who have been of great support throughout this whole ordeal.

34. My illnesses have had an impact on my sons and siblings, as well as on my father when he was alive. My father was a strong man who was extremely upset about my illness and the effects it had on me.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

35. When I was first diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I struggled to receive Interferon as a treatment. My doctor, Dr Alan Jones at Llwyncelyn Practice, fought on my behalf to ensure I received Interferon injections. It took me two to three years to be given Interferon treatment because of this.

36. My dentist, Dr [GRO-D] of [GRO-D] Practice, [GRO-D] wrote me a letter upon hearing that I had previously been infected with Hepatitis C. I am unsure how he was made aware of this, and he had been my dentist for approximately eight or nine years. This letter was nasty and angry in tone, and was in my opinion improper and unprofessional. I refuse to return to Dr [GRO-D]'s practice after receiving this letter.

37. I have never been offered counselling or psychological support in respect of my Hepatitis C infection or Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

38. My sister wrote an email to the Hepatitis C Trust Helpline on 15 July 2016. **Exhibit WITN0187003** refs. Outlining my infection with Hepatitis C and requesting any advice as to what can be done to help me. I remember being sent some forms, which I completed and sent back. The process was fairly straightforward.

39. I subsequently received a payment of £20,000 from the Skipton Fund, and receive further payments of £300 every month.

40. This money is very useful but it certainly does not make up for the loss of earnings and the lifestyle I lost.

Section 8. Other Issues

41. I am angry and frustrated at the events surrounding the use of infected blood, and would like to know why this happened and why it was not prevented, who new about the possibility that infected blood was being used?

42. I believe that there may have been a cover up of the truth in relation to what was known and why this was not prevented from happening.

43. My sister Christine Willis has a far better memory than me and will be able to give you more details as to how the Hepatitis C affected both me and my family.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 12th June 2019