

Witness Name: Victoria Julia Sanchez

Statement No.: WITN0231001

Exhibits:

Dated: 15/01/2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### WRITTEN STATEMENT OF VICTORIA JULIA SANCHEZ

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 28 January 2019.

I, Victoria Julia Sanchez with the input of my mother Linda Ann Sanchez, will say as follows: -

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Victoria Sanchez. My date of birth is GRO-C 1974 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I currently partake in volunteer-work four days a week at a local hospital and I live with my mother and father.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C Virus ("HCV") and the impact it has had on my life and the life of my family.
3. I confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me with my statement. My mother is also present to recall her thoughts and feelings, as I have suffered with

mild learning difficulties since birth. She will also provide her own statement.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

4. I was infected with HCV from the day I was born. Since I was born I suffered from a condition that required a blood transfusion, due to a Petechial haemorrhage. I had suffered from the condition when I was hours old and after was placed in intensive care.
5. See my mother's statement [WITN0230001] for further details surrounding my infection during the years after I was born.
6. Throughout my childhood I was constantly unwell and felt ill My condition was getting worse as time went on. I was under the paediatric liver department at King's College Hospital. My illness seemed to be a mystery and nobody knew the problem. After many tests and consultations, I was diagnosed with non-A non-B liver disease. There were no treatments at the time to help and doctors struggled to find out exactly what was wrong with me. I was put onto steroid treatment for a prolonged period to help my symptoms. At the time this was the only treatment available.
7. At the age of 18 I was referred to the adult liver clinic at King's College Hospital. At this time, I was under the care of Doctor Tibbs. It was at this point in around the early 1990's that HCV was confirmed. I was in complete shock at the thought of being infected. At this time the doctors wanted to refer back to my childhood notes but they could not find my records and then told me that they may have been destroyed in a fire at the hospital some years earlier. This seems rather convenient looking back? I have subsequently seen my GP's records hoping to get some further information on my illness from 1974 to the late 1980's and have found no records from my time

under Kings paediatric department, even though through this time I had biopsies and many other treatments. There is no correspondence from Dr Mowat on file even though he was my consultant for many years in childhood.

8. In 1993 I received a letter to confirm that I had been diagnosed with HCV. For the next ten years I underwent a series of drug trials in an attempt to clear the virus. My family and I were given no advice on how to deal with HCV, information about the virus itself, its damning affects or any safeguards that needed to be put in place. According to my mother we were told to be careful but did not receive much information on how to manage and deal with my infection.
9. In 1993 I was placed on Alpha Interferon. Next, in 1994 I was placed on Interferon and Ribavirin together, as the Interferon alone was not working. In 2008 I started on another drug trial, this time for Pegulated Interferon and Ribavirin. Again, this was unsuccessful leading to me being placed on a placebo of Interferon, Ribavirin and Telepavir in 2009. During my final trial in the same year, I received the actual drugs, Interferon, Ribavirin and Telepavir together by injection which cleared the virus in 2010.
10. I would like to say that every time I went on a drug trail it took up to a year out of my life. I remember looking like a skeleton and being almost unrecognisable. I lost my hair and was always tired and irritable and often suffered blotching and other skin rashes as side effects of the treatments I received.
11. I now suffer from chronic liver disease. This is a consequence of my HCV being untreated and undiagnosed for many years.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

12. I do not believe that as a result of my blood transfusion at birth I contracted any virus other than HCV. However, I do believe that as a result of my infection I have suffered and still suffer from a number of other illnesses, which have and do impact my life including chronic liver cirrhosis that has led in turn to ascites, portal vein bleeding, banding and now portal vein thrombosis. The damage to my liver is so severe that it is only being supported by a cocktail of drugs and injections I have been told I will require a liver transplant in the near future. In fact, this was discussed at my last appointment in February 2019. Basically, after 44 years of the virus and its consequences, my liver is now giving up.

### **Section 4. Consent**

13. I have been asked if I was ever treated or tested without knowledge or consent and the answer is no, I have always consented to the treatments since I was of an age to do so. I actually think that they wanted to try things on me as I was one of the youngest people being treated at the time.
14. However, I am aware from my mother that she was never fully informed of the risks associated with the transfusion or the consequential treatments. Certainly, later, I was never told how badly the drug trials would affect me mentally, physically and emotionally.

### **Section 5. Impact**

15. During my infection with HCV and treatment I felt horrible. I was thin and used to think about the infection all the time. I am constantly worried about my health and whether the illness would be the end of me. It is draining, all the hospital appointments, I can't live a normal life. I want to be a normal 44 year old. It is wrong, it is not what my life

should be like and it is not what any human should have to go through. There is always another problem. Taking tablets twice a day, a mountain of tablets. I always have to remember to take them and remember prescriptions to make sure that I have enough.

16. The side effects from the treatment were horrendous. I had severe weight loss and went down to around 48kg. I suffered from hair loss, breathlessness, could not walk and could not sleep. I have also suffered from hearing loss; I did some research and found that this could be a direct side effect from the Interferon and Ribavirin. I asked the doctors about this but they told me that they could not confirm that was the case. The side effects of my last trial were so bad that I was referred to a psychiatric doctor. At this stage, the doctors wanted to stop the trial but we were so near the end my parents wanted to give me every chance to clear the virus. But for their persistence, the treatment may have been stopped.
17. Every time I went on the trial it was on the same thing. More pain and discomfort. On one occasion I actually felt like refusing the trial and sometimes thought that the whole process was not worth it. I was also worried about how it would affect my mum. It must be awful, the constant worry. I just feel so sorry for her.
18. My mum will tell you about an incident where I suffered an episode of internal bleeding. I ended up in hospital but not before I thought I was spending my last few moments on earth. I thought I was going to go, my life was over, it was that bad.
19. I now suffer from a bloated stomach due to water retention. This is another side effect for which I have to take further tablets. There is a huge amount of tablets and the doctors just keep upping my doses. I have developed a blood clot and have to start anti-coagulant treatment. Additionally, I am suffering from anaemia and this requires further medication called Ferratin and Furosimide. I believe that all of

these side effects are as a consequence of my liver cirrhosis, which was caused by my infected blood resulting in HCV.

20. I have had many opportunities taken away from me; I cannot drink alcohol and I feel embarrassed by this. My social life has been severely impacted. It is difficult to attend nights out or plan any getaways with friends and this makes me upset.
21. I would like to add that I have been denied the opportunity to have a child. Some of my friends from school went on to marry and have children. I have never had the chance to meet someone due to my continued illness and subsequent treatment. There would also have been the genetic problems to worry about and surmount. All of this as a result of my infected transfusion, something I had at birth. These missed opportunities that I have faced can never be rectified or replaced; they have just left me thinking about the consequences of my infection.
22. I have never even been well enough to have a permanent job. My mother persuaded me to partake in volunteer work four days a week at a local hospital which I enjoy. Apart from this, I have struggled to find a job with the only employment I have had being at the Benefits Agency. However, I was let go, as I could not keep up with the workload due to regular absence whilst attending my hospital treatments.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

23. I have never had any problems in obtaining treatment from hospitals, doctors or dentists. My dentist was aware of the infection but I never encountered any problems.
24. I can confirm that in the past I have never been offered psychological support or made aware of such support in relation to my HCV

infection.

25. I can also confirm that during my interview with the inquiry, my mother and I have been informed about the access to the support mechanism that the British Red Cross provide.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

26. Most of my financial issues are dealt with by my mother. I am aware of some compensation payments that we received and I know that I receive a monthly amount to support me. [See mother's statement: **WITN0230001**]

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

27. I understand my mother has attached a letter [**Exhibit WITN0230002**]. It gives the dates on which diagnosis was made for both the HCV and cirrhosis of the liver.

28.

NOT RELEVANT

#### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 15/04/2019