Witness Name: Gillian Patricia Pearson
Statement No.: WITN0233001
Exhibits: WITN0233002-3
Dated: 5 July 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GILLIAN PATRICIA PEARSON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 23 January 2019.

I, Gillian Patricia Pearson, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Gillian Pearson. My date of birth is GRO-C 1945 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I retired at the age of sixty-three having worked for a company that imported flower baskets. I currently reside by myself in the Isle of Wight, where I moved in 2009.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus ("HCV"), which I contracted as a result of being given an infected transfusion, following a caesarean section.

3. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my life and the life of my family.

4. 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.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was infected with HCV on GRO-C 1971 following a caesarean section, which required a transfusion of five pints of blood at St. Helier Hospital, Sutton.

6. Whilst recovering from the birth and transfusion, a nurse saw me hobbling along the corridor. She arranged for a doctor to see me and they realised that I had a blood clot in my leg. I was put on medication to cure this. Unfortunately, I had to stop feeding my daughter myself as the medication could have caused bleeding in her. When the clot had cleared I was discharged and was able to get on with my life. I thought nothing more of what happened at the time of the birth, including my blood transfusion.

7. Ten years passed and I found that I was beginning to suffer from general fatigue. It gradually got worse and took more of a hold on me. I was always tired. Although I used to struggle to remember that far back my memories have built up of late. At the time, I started to wonder if I was just doing too much or if I was simply getting older. I was going through a difficult time domestically and this didn't help. Eventually, my marriage broke down and the house had to be sold which caused me to move and find another home. Once I retired I decided to move to my current address.

8. The doctor at my local surgery, Dr Erskine, decided to send me for a blood test – I didn't ask at the time what I was being tested for – but the test came back negative. He sent me over the next few weeks for further tests but all had the same result. I was not sure what I was

being tested for at the time but I recall the doctor assured me he was simply attempting to find out why I was so fatigued.

9. Dr. Erskine eventually ran out of ideas of what to test for. However, he had told me about another patient who had tested positive for HCV and thought that he would try the same test for me. He had told me that he did not expect the test to come back as positive. On 27 August 1999, I received the results of the test. It had come back as positive and I was diagnosed with having HCV. Dr Erskine later informed me that he had the shock of his life when he got the result.

10. I remember that it was a bit of shock for me when I was diagnosed, I was at work and one of the GP's rang me and said that they had received my results. The doctor on the phone told me that I was HCV positive. I was dumbstruck. I remember thinking how can you tell me this over the phone. I didn't know what to say and it was hard to take it all in.

11. I do not remember what the doctors told me about the infection itself or how to manage it. I don't recall being given any advice about precautions to take, either in relation to my family life or in general. I went out and bought a computer to do my own research on what my diagnosis with HCV meant for me.

12. I do remember that I was told that they could not give me any treatment at the time; this will be explained later in the treatment section of my statement.

13. I eventually just came to terms with it. Initially, my boss looked up what the virus was at work as he had internet at the time and I didn't. He printed off articles and it did not look good. It then dawned on me that the articles he had printed off were from gay men's websites and they stated that often the virus could be sexually transmitted. At the first

time of reading this was devastating. I read and re-read the articles and then realised that the likelihood of it being transmitted in a normal heterosexual relationship was minimal. It was a shock at the time of finding out so I went out to buy a computer to research HCV and this allowed me to gain some personal knowledge about the condition.

14. These internet articles caused me a lot of stress but I soon realised, based on my own research that it must have come from the transfusion. It was the only way I could have got it. I have never used drugs or had tattoos. It was the only route it could have possibly been. When I spoke to my doctors about the link between the transfusion and infection, they agreed that I must have contracted the virus via the transfusion.

15. I had my first biopsy on 21 December 1999. The results confirmed that I had some damage to my liver. Within a year or two of the first biopsy, I had a second biopsy; this again showed further, significant damage to my liver.

16. On 21 August 2000, I went to see Dr.Tibbs at St. George's Hospital Haematology Department. I was transferred, from St. Helier as they did not have the necessary facilities. Despite my liver problems including increased damage to the organ, I was still being told that I could not receive treatment. I decided to contact my local MP: Tom Brake Initially, I went and spoke to Mr. Brake at his constituency office, which was just around the corner from where I was working, and we discussed my infected transfusion. He later confirmed that he had made enquiries on my behalf. (Exhibit; WITN0233002).

17. Even after speaking to Mr. Brake I did not receive treatment until 2003. It took a long time for the health authorities to green light my treatment. I had by this time joined a Support Group in the USA which helped me enormously in understanding the illness and they kept me

up-to-date on the latest treatments I started my course of medication in October 2003 and finished April 2004. I was placed on Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. I had a six-month check-up on 26 October 2004 and the blood test taken on that appointment showed that I had cleared the virus. Initially, I did not believe that I had cleared the virus. I wanted to be absolutely sure as I had lived with it for so long. Therefore, I continued to have regular blood tests for the next two years to confirm I was still clear of the virus. Two years after my treatment I received a letter from Lee Scott to confirm that I was still clear of HCV. (Exhibit; WITN0233003)

18. The last blood test I had was in 2006 and I currently do not have any tests in relation to my liver. I rarely drink alcohol as it is always in the back of my mind that my liver could be damaged.

Section 3. Other Infections

19. I do not believe that I have contracted any other infections as a result of being given an infected transfusion. However, I do believe that I have suffered in many other ways, which will be explored in the impact section of this statement.

Section 4. Consent

20. I have been asked if I have ever been tested or treated without my knowledge or consent and the answer is no. I have never been tested or treated without my consent and I do not think I was experimented on. I have consented to my blood tests and although I was not sure what they were for, my doctor at the time, Dr Erskine was simply trying to find out what was wrong with me.

Section 5. Impact

21. The physical effects of being infected with HCV have had a major impact on my life. The main effects started to show themselves when I was in my mid-thirties. My marriage had by then broken down and we had to sell the marital home and I found a smaller house nearby. I wanted to stay in the area so our daughter could continue her schooling.

22. I started to notice how quickly I became tired. I thought to myself; "If this is getting old then I don't want to do this". I started to feel as though all of my limbs were aching: my arms, legs and my hands. It was virtually constant pain. Sometimes, I could not get out of bed in the mornings it was so bad. Often, I would have to sit down after even the shortest spell of physical activity. I just could not keep going. My daughter was getting older and I should have been full of life and we should have been doing things together. Instead I was always tired. I did think that getting old contributed to the way I was feeling but knew it wasn't totally responsible.

23. Taking the medication was hard on my body and made me very tired. With agreement from my boss, I finished work at 3 instead of 5, working through my lunch hour and taking an hour off my working day. A further complication arose when my hair started to thin and fall out in places.

24. The main physical affect from the treatment was the fatigue. I was trying to live my life, keep working and doing normal things but it was so difficult. I pity the people that had partake in the treatment for a year. Luckily, I had to do the treatment for only six months. To this day I still live with the pains in my arms and legs but I have not let it curtail my experiences as I often go for a walk in the afternoon. I will not let it beat me. I am just thankful to be alive.

25. I have also had to deal with various mental effects as a result of my infection with HCV. The process of injecting the Interferon was scary to start with as I used to stand there with the needle I my hand, willing myself to insert the needle into my arm. I injected on a Friday so I had the weekend to rest. I remember thinking: *'how can I inject myself like this?'* I dreaded Friday's coming around when I knew I would have to inject myself again.

26. Psychologically, I was deeply affected. I used to think; "what have I done to deserve this". I did get depressed at times but I thought that everybody does suffer with depression at times. I never sought or was offered any treatment in relation to that. It may have been one of the reasons my marriage broke down earlier as I was always fatigued but I will never know for sure. I would try and swim and play badminton but mentally and physically I could not keep up. I just tried not to think about it. I was very relieved when I could finally put a reason as to the way I was feeling.

27. I do not feel as though I had any problems in obtaining dental treatment. I told my dentist about my infection and it did not seem to bother him. I do not feel that it has caused me any problems in relation to treatment, or how I was treated, for any other medical condition.

28. I have not had to deal with any stigma associated with my infection with HCV. I have never hidden it from anybody. It was not my fault I got the virus. It was given to via an infected transfusion and so I am not going to hide away. It did not cause any problems with friends or family. My boss knew at work but I did not generally broadcast it.

29. My infection with HCV has not had much financial impact on my life other than the fact I had to go part time instead of full time at work. I have never had a mortgage, as when I broke up with my husband I was able to purchase a small home, which was mortgage free. I have

never had life insurance and have had no problems with travel insurance.

30. By the time I was diagnosed with HCV my daughter was living in GRO-C We had lived together for 18 years whilst I was still unaware that I suffered from the illness.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

31. I do not feel as though I was denied any treatment at the time of diagnosis as the funding just wasn't available.

32. The local Health Authority would not authorise the treatment at this stage. I think a nurse practitioner told me they could not afford it. I remember they were really annoyed that they could not offer me the medication but said it was down to local health authority management, who were saying it was very expensive.

33. I recall the nurse practitioner saying to me: '*why should you suffer*'. It had happened through a blood transfusion and through no fault of my own. But the health authorities would not budge.

34. This is what led me to contacting my local MP Tom Brake in 2000, who wrote to the doctor at the hospital, Dr. Tibbs in an attempt help me obtain treatment. I was eventually successful in obtaining treatment but it took a further three years from the time I first notified Mr. Brake of my problem.

35. I can confirm that I have never been offered any psychological support to help me manage my infection nor the sometimes, horrifying results of the consequential treatment. I just tried to remain positive throughout.

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

Section 7. Financial Assistance

37. I received financial assistance via the Skipton Fund. I had read an article in my daily newspaper in forming those who had been infected with HCV to contact the Skipton Fund. I cannot remember the exact dates. I applied and was successful in getting the financial help and this led to me receiving a Stage 1 payment of £10,000 and then after a small period of time, I received a further £10,000. I do not believe there were any conditions in my contract. Later, I also received an extra £250 a month from the Skipton Fund as an additional payment.

38. I feel that the process of applying to the Skipton Fund was smooth and hassle free. I had no problems at all and if I needed to phone them, they would always be very friendly and helpful.

39. Currently, I receive £1800 a month from the English Infected Blood Supporters Scheme ("EIBSS"). I am very grateful for this.

Section 8. Other Issues

40. I would like the Inquiry to know about a time where my local MP Tom Brake had got in touch with the local paper in my area and asked me if I wanted to partake in an interview. I obliged and they came to my house. We underwent an interview together and I was able to get my story out to the public. I was happy, as hopefully this would allow others to think about getting tested.

41. I would also like the inquiry to know that I am quite a positive person and it was a shock to initially be diagnosed with HCV. However, I have

always thought that I have just got to get on with it. I was cleared and that was that. I thought I should get on with life and I intend on living a good life.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 5 July 2019