Witness Name: C J Wood
Statement No: WITN1729001
Exhibits:0
Dated: September 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CUTH JOHN WOOD

I, Cuth John Wood, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Cuth John Wood. My date of GRO-C 1970. I currently live at GRO-C.

2. I was infected with Hepatitis C as a result of being infected with contaminated blood products.

3. **I make this statement without the benefit of access to my full medical records.**

Section 2. How infected

4. I suffer from Haemophilia B (Christmas disease). I was diagnosed as a child and, during my childhood, believe I received blood products for bleeds when I had any major injury.

5. I believe I was treated with Factor IX pre 1974 and around 1985 but I have not had access to my medical records so, at this stage, cannot provide any further details.

6. I was treated at the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) in Newcastle under the care of Dr Jones.

7. I was never given any information about the risk of infection from blood products. I was not told anything until I was 42, by which time I had already had a breakdown.

8. I was told that I had Hepatitis C in 2012 by my doctor in Bradford. There was a letter between my Bradford haematologist and my Birmingham haematologist which confirmed my infection was from treatment with contaminated blood products but I have been unable to locate a copy of this letter.

9. When I was told I had Hepatitis C I was not given any information about the infection; I was just told to make an appointment with my liver doctor. When I saw him I was told I needed to lose weight and that they could not help me until I did.

10. I had become really ill, my nerves were completely shot. I was very dependant on alcohol and cannabis. I was so weak. I broke my leg and had to go into hospital. I was in for a month, and during that time they told me I had Hep C. They told me I would potentially be eligible for £20,000 and I thought that was great at the time. I hadn't really come to terms with what was happening.

11. I believe that I should have been given information about the risk of infection from blood products at the time I was treated with them. When I was a child this information should have been given to my parents.

12. I find it very difficult to talk about what happened as I have severe agoraphobia, panic disorder and social anxiety. Over the years this has meant I have been unable to attend doctor and hospital appointments.

Section 3. Other Infections

13. I do not know whether I have been exposed to any other infections but I believe my nervous state and breakdown were caused by my undiagnosed (at the time) Hepatitis C infection.

Section 4. Consent

14. Neither my parents nor I were advised of the risk of infection from blood products therefore we could not have consented to treatment with the same.

15. I don't believe I ever consented to my Hep C test. I believe I was just told of my infection, I was just told that I had had a blood test and it showed I might have had Hep C, and they wanted to do further tests. It was as this point I had a liver scan.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

16. Some of the mental and physical effects of being infected with at a young age in my early teens are that I began to get huge sores at the back of my head and the doctors couldn't cure it.

17. This is because my body was trying to cleanse itself by sending all impurities through the skin which is normally the job of the liver but because Hep C affects the liver this can cause such skin disorders (or so I'm told).

18. I then began to self-medicate with alcohol in order to relieve some of the symptoms caused by the undisclosed Hep C. This self-medication led to further aggravation of my illness because I had not been diagnosed and advised to avoid or limit my alcohol intake.

19. This self medication then developed into alcohol dependency. I also developed a case of excessive sweating that sprung up any time I was in contact with another person or in public which led to more need of alcohol to

dampen the panic levels that caused the excessive sweating.I also found myself sweating profusely for seemingly no reason.

20. Regarding my Hep C symptoms, it mainly increased my stress and that stress takes its toll on the body over a prolonged period of time. The main area of concern with regards to such long term stress and prolonged body dysfunction is damage to my immune system.

21. In my early adult life I used to work from age of 16 to 21, in this time span I used to be very strong and also used to work on night club doors.

22. It was only when I was in full time work and started having a drink with friends on weekend that I start to get very ill and weakened.

23. Around the mid to late 80s early 90s I became quite introverted and a different person from thea strong, long hours working person that was also the life and soul of the party, to being unable to get out of bed, with days being in a daze having uncontrollable shakes with feeling worry and anxious all the time.

24. My work up to then had seen me buy a house in GRO-C Berkshire but upon this onset of illness and increasing weakness I eventually got behind in mortgage payments and lost the house, sending me into an even bigger depression.

25. Around my mid to late 20s, my hair loss at the back of my head spread to the top of my scalp balding. This was highly embarrassing at such a young age due to the stress of my illness.

26. When I was 23 I lost my partner. I was groggy and ill tempered and took things out on those closest to me. This meant that my partner and I drifted apart.

27. This led to a continuous, vicious cycle of a vicious circle of at first just social drinking, then it hit hard due to Hep C and alcohol mix (unknown to me having

the infection), then increased weakness and illness – which meant I turned to alcohol to reduce symptoms of now increased weakness.

28. In turn that alcohol and Hep C was the cause of the increased weakness and illness. In turn becoming dependant on the substance that is causing my unknown illness to increase. I started to recede into myself, and stopped socialising as I didn't like the effects of alcohol on my body and mind. I stayed away form others as much as I could; only going out once or twice a week. I started to use alcohol as 'Dutch Courage', which would give me the strength to go to the shops or walks along the canal.

29. Although I was dependent on alcohol, I was not a full blown alcoholic. Using it only as a means to an end, to get me out of the house. I felt I could stop whenever I wanted to, which I did in 2012. However, on the days I would drink alcohol I would usually carry on drinking when I got back to the house. This, in turn, left me with 3 day long hangovers which would make me feel sick.

30. I was told in 2016 that I have a panic disorder, agoraphobia and anxiety. I believe that these illnesses (and possibly my diabetes) are all linked to Hep C.

31. I got more and more into debt after I lost my house. Matters came to a head when I was subject to a Debt Relief Order (a type of bankruptcy for people one low incomes). This put a black mark against my name, stopped me from getting credit and meant I could not get approved for housing without a guarantor. My infection has therefore had a huge impact on me financially.

32. I was treated with Harvoni which didn't work. First of all they said I had to go and see the hepatologist and make an appointment. I was so weak at the time I didn't get to book an appointment, but 3 months later I was in hospital so went for the appointment whilst I was there. I was told I was eligible for Harvoni, but I could only take it once. At the time I was massively over weight, weighing in at about 20 stone. This meant I had to wait to start the treatment until I was healthy, so I kept myself healthy and a year later I was able to start the treatment. This would have been about 2016. I took the treatment for 8 weeks, with no side effects. However, 12 weeks later, I was tested to see if I

had cleared the virus and I was told that I was part of 2% of the population who were resistant to Harvoni.

33. It was a very hard time for me, I didn't really know much about the Hep C. I knew it was bad but had no idea what was going on. I was more worried about the diabetes than anything else, just trying my best to stay healthy.

34. Then I started to sweat profusely in public. This would happen not just on the rare occasion, but anytime I went out in public. This meant I could not see my family and friends as I was too embarrassed at my seemingly ridiculous state of mental health.

35. The heavy sweating, stumbling over words and getting gripped with a full blown panic attack was the final stage; the attack would happen from the moment I left the house to entering a shop or building and got worse in the waiting rooms or shop counter – every time I would be wondering when it would turn in to a full blown panic attack with the sweating etc.

36. When I shop I am constantly wondering if I will be able to get the full shop I need without having to leave first because of a panic attack. When I have to leave part way through I have tried going outside and then re-starting the shop once I have cooled down but this often leads to more paranoia.

37. This meant I didn't' my parents and family now for over 20 years and have lived nearly all of my adult life as a recluse; my therapists had me on a 12 week course but could solve the problem.

38. In 2018 my sister saw a picture of me in hospital and saw the name of the hospital so managed to track me down. This is the only reason that I have been reunited with my family. Otherwise I would have continued to keep my address a secret because I was too embarrassed about my illnesses.

39. There are only a few ways that I can cope in public:

   a. If the person I meet is not a stranger (I then have a better chance of holding it together)
   b. If the person I'm meeting is dealing with and knows my exact illness (including the sweating and nervous breakdown symptoms)

40. Sometimes I can cope if it is a face to face meeting for less than 10 minutes with no small talk but often I start to unravel and start sweating, stumbling over my words and get gripped by a panic attack so that I need extra water and skin cream. I have to concentrate on my breathing to try and get through but, by then, am desperate for the meeting to end.

41. For 30 years I was degenerating. I have lost the ability to socialise; I was living my life with Hep C with no idea. I was drinking a lot to ease the pain and it was making me weaker and weaker. I was trying to escape. Being infected with Hep C has left me unable to socialise at all. I was working three jobs, trying to buy a house in London and then '*BAM*' I was infected. I lost a lot, I became too ill and I lost the house at 23. I was on an upward path and then I hit a down spiral. I was so ill, thinking I had lost a lot. I lost my future; I thought it was because I was ill and stupid, not because I was infected.

42. I didn't even find out until 2012 that I was infected. For 30 years I thought it was just because I lost momentum. The payments I receive don't cover me, I feel like I'm asking for compensation of the average wage lost for 30 years. If I could socialise I wouldn't be asking for so much, but I am stuck in the house all the time. I want to find ways of doing stuff, maybe start a business from home. My ability to do stuff in a day has diminished, with mental fatigue. I do little things each day, and I do have a nice life style but it's all come form benefits and the EIBSS. It's not enough to actually leave dependency, and it is not exactly where I would be had I not been infected. My brain hasn't stopped at all but my energy has been diminished. I don't have the ability to work my way up to the top anymore, and I would need a leg up in order to help me become financially independent.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

43. I am now on a waiting list for a more in depth professional analysis. The first time round I was on waiting list for a very long time and now have been on a new waiting list for many months, some people have been on these psychological therapy waiting lists for years which I assume is down to government cuts.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

44. In 2012 I was given a lump sum of £20,000. I believe this was the Stage 1 payment from the Skipton Fund. It went very quickly. I tried to set up my own business but that failed as I was too ill. It was after this that I fell into debt, resulting in the Debt Relief Order.

45. It was not until about 2016 that I became aware I might also be entitled to a monthly payment from the Skipton Fund. This started in 2016 and was backdated (albeit not until the date of my actual infection). I received £3,500 per year.

46. Since 2018 I have been receiving £22,340 per year made up of £18,000 plus top ups of £320 per month because my Hep C is contributing to mental health problems.

Section 8. Other Issues

47. I believe that payments should be backdated to the time of infection.

48. I want someone to say sorry for that has happened and admit to past mistakes so that I can have closure and move forward.

49. I want to be recognised as a priority, when you got to hospital no one knows who you are or anything about you. You get put in the queue with everyone else, for things they have given us. You have to put down what is wrong on a sheet of paper and wait in line for an illness that they caused themselves.

They should prioritise us because they actually injured us. I did not bring this on myself. It was done to me.

Anonymity

50. I do not want to remain anonymous.

51. I do not wish to provide oral evidence to the inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.... GRO-C .....

Dated...07/09/2019.......................................

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