

Witness Name: Rachael Garrett

Statement No: WITN3009001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: April 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RACHAEL GARRETT

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I, Rachael Garrett will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Rachael Garrett. My address is   
 My date of birth is   
 1987. I live with my husband and our two year old daughter. I am employed as a firefighter at Belfast International Airport.
2. I make this statement in relation to my Dad, William Trevor Marsden whose date of birth is  1950. He was infected with Hepatitis C as a result of being given contaminated blood products. My Dad has given his own statement to the Inquiry. His witness number is WITN1372001.

#### Section 2. How infected

3. I refer to my Dad's witness statement regarding the background of how he was infected, the advice he was given prior to receiving blood products, consent and how he found out he was infected with Hepatitis C.

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

4. From my Dad's Solicitor's review of his medical records, we have discovered that in addition to being infected with Hepatitis C, my Dad tested positive for CMV and Parvovirus in 1996. I have also recently been told that his medical records refer to blood test results which confirm past infection with Hepatitis A and B or my Dad having been vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B, which he does not believe he has been.
5. With the introduction of the Inquiry, new information has been brought to light which we have been unaware of for years. For all we know, there could be other things my Dad has been infected with, which have not been communicated to him or which have been omitted from his records. As a result I am now very sceptical when I hear about any test results or medical records.
6. My parents now feel the need to obtain a second opinion to verify the accuracy of the information in my Dad's medical records.
7. My Dad was informed that he was at risk of having vCJD. We do not know when or if this will present itself. I do not know if my Dad was offered any support when he was told about vCJD, but I don't think there has been adequate consideration of my Dad's well being or mental health with the chance of developing this hanging over him.
8. I don't think those who told him about the risk of him having vCJD really thought about the impact that information would have on him. My Dad does not know what the future holds. No-one has put those things into perspective for him.

### **Section 4. Consent**

9. Please refer to paragraph 3.

## **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

10. The biggest impact Hepatitis C has had on my Dad has been fatigue and tiredness. It affected his day to day life. He also experienced problems with his liver. My Dad very rarely drinks but when he takes a glass of wine or eats certain foods, such as spicy food it affects his liver. When he eats things that affect his liver he experiences aches and pains and general discomfort, particularly through the night. He always tries to hide his physical symptoms from us. It's not in my Dad's nature to complain about feeling unwell. He prefers to carry on as normally as he can. My Dad would never tell us if he was feeling tired or unwell.
11. My Dad used to be a very fit man, always up and about. When he became unwell he wanted to carry on doing things for himself. He didn't want his health to affect his family. He has never been the kind of man to ask for help and has to be extremely unwell to do so.
12. My first recollection is of my Dad being unwell after receiving his first round of treatment.
13. I refer to my Dad's witness statement regarding the further medical complications or conditions which have resulted from his Hepatitis C infection.
14. I'm aware that my Dad went through two courses of treatments for his Hepatitis C, six months of treatment in the late 1990s and a year of treatment in 2006. I recall that his treatment each time was a combination of Interferon and Ribavirin.
15. Details of the treatment my Dad had and any difficulties he faced in obtaining treatment would be best described in his witness statement.
16. I do not know whether there were treatments which I ought to have been (but were not) made available to my Dad, as I do not know what was available at the time. However, I believe there was more that could have been done to support my Dad whilst he was going through treatment. Looking back now I

understand what he was going through with regards to the treatment, I cannot understand why no medical professional ever came to our house to check on his progress, particularly as I understand that the treatment was relatively new at that time.

17. When my Dad was on the first course of treatment I was ten, so my memories of that time are limited. Looking back as an adult, I can appreciate what happened, but at the time, seeing my Dad so physically helpless was difficult to see as I was only a child and did not understand what was happening. It was very frightening and I will never forget that time.
18. Whilst my Dad was on treatment, I remember very clearly that he was in a state of complete despair. He was unable to do anything for himself and my Mum would have to physically lift him into bed. He would be curled up in bed like a child, constantly shivering. My Dad sometimes broke down in tears and he desperately wanted to come off the treatment. It took a lot of encouragement from my Mum for him to keep having the injections, as he was in so much pain. I know that my Dad was in a complete state of helplessness.
19. I cannot explain in words how the treatment impacted him mentally, but I can only imagine how emotionally difficult it was for him. To some extent, my siblings and I were shielded from my Dad's suffering, but it was very distressing for me as a child to see my Dad so unwell and not fully understanding what was happening or why. As a family, we do not talk about that time as it is so emotional and upsetting for us all.
20. I cannot say for certain if my Dad's medical or dental care was impacted by his infected status, and I refer to my Dad's statement regarding this. I can say that anytime my Dad required medical attention, it felt like he was always passed onto someone else for treatment and the buck was passed. I believe that was due to the stigma of his infected status and the complications that being a Haemophiliac add to that. I have often attended medical appointments with my Dad, particularly to ensure the right information is communicated.

21. My Dad eventually gave up his livelihood as a farmer as he was physically unable to continue farming. My Mum, siblings and I helped him with the upkeep of the farm as best as we could. I have now taken over the farm with my husband and we pay my parents rent for it. There is a very strong emotional tie to the farm for my Dad and it would destroy him if he had to sell it for financial reasons
22. My Dad's health problems arising from his Hepatitis C infection and treatment have restricted what he has been able to do.
23. In terms of our home life, my Dad tried his best not to let his health affect his children. He always put 110% effort into us and pushed through his pain and still does. He never complained about his symptoms. Nevertheless, we were always concerned about our Dad's wellbeing as we could see that he was exhausted. I believe his general health today has been affected by his Hepatitis C infection and will continue to be.
24. Because my Dad led a very active life in his youth, coupled with his determination, he endured the treatment and cleared his Hepatitis C. I would imagine he would probably be bed ridden by now or worse if he hadn't been able to endure the treatment.
25. Growing up my Mum had warned my siblings and I never to use our Dad's toothbrush. We had our own toothbrushes and the thought of using someone else's would never have crossed my mind, but my Mum made a point of telling us this. This was probably because we shared a bathroom.
26. I did not fully understand why I was being told not to use my Dad's toothbrush. I knew he had Hepatitis C and it could be transferred by saliva but I did not understand what Hepatitis C was and where it came from. It was frightening as a child and worried me.
27. As I have mentioned, when my Dad was unwell the upkeep of the farm fell on my Mum, my siblings and I. From a young age I was milking cows. This was difficult as it required very early morning starts. On top of that, I felt a responsibility to care for my Dad. It was not a burden, but we felt a sense of

responsibility to care for him when in normal society, my parents were supposed to look after us. That was always in my mind, even when I was at grammar school and at University.

28. Alongside my older sisters, I had to ensure that my Dad was eating well. We did whatever we needed to, to make him comfortable. We cooked him lunch and dinner and tried to keep him busy.

29. When I was a child, it was hard for me to appreciate the impact of what was happening to my Dad. When I reached my twenties, I got some perspective on what happened to my Dad.

30. With the introduction of the Inquiry and my parents having seen my Dad's medical records we have pieced together the events of the past. I feel angry that what happened to my Dad was allowed to happen in the first place.

31. The biggest impact of my Dad's infection on my life has been becoming an adult and putting into perspective what happened to my Dad and what, where and how it happened. We have discovered things that we would never have known if the Inquiry hadn't happened.

32. I see my Dad ageing now and it makes me wonder how he would have been if he hadn't been infected.

33. I think about the care my Dad may need in the future and I worry about how we will cope and what his quality of life will be like constantly.

34. For our own peace of mind, even though the risk of transmission is low, in light of the things that have recently been uncovered in my Dad's medical records, my siblings and I all plan to be tested for infections. As my sisters and I have children, we are concerned that if any of us have infections we may have passed them on to our children, although we know the likelihood of this is very low.

35. I could not afford to have private testing carried out. I plan to ask my GP or a senior haematologist at the hospital about this. This will have its own

difficulties, as often the haematology department does not want to be bothered with something if the matter has already been dealt with by another department.

36. In terms of stigma, times have moved on and I have discussed my Dad's infection with my husband Marvin openly.

37. My Dad's Hepatitis C infection has had the biggest toll on my Mum. When my dad was on treatment, my Mum had to care for him and look after four children whilst maintaining a household. Having to stay strong and keep everything as normal as possible must have been extremely difficult for her. In the end, she literally had to force my Dad to have the treatment. Other than the support from my siblings and I, she had to endure everything alone. I feel my Dad would probably still be farming today had he not been infected. It is too difficult to describe how much the family farm means to him.

38. My Mum has never discussed my Dad's Hepatitis C infection or how it affected her in depth. I would find it too difficult to read the statement she is giving to the Inquiry. I feel I would also find it extremely difficult to read my Dad's statement.

39. It was a very dark time for my Mum. It must have been terrifying not to know if her husband would survive and how the rest of our lives would be impacted. Having to raise 4 children in those circumstances must have been incredibly difficult.

40. My older sisters, Nicola and Lucy were older when my Dad was unwell and had his treatment, so I imagine that would have had a bigger impact on them than my younger brother Sam and I. They also often had to care for my younger brother Sam and I when my Dad was unwell and our Mum was caring for him or working. They had this additional responsibility as teenagers.

41. In the last couple of years, my siblings and I have openly discussed what happened to my Dad, which was very emotional for us. My oldest sister, Nicola has been particularly affected by what happened to our Dad.

42. Gradually, it came to a point where my Dad had to give up farming completely. I think I was in primary school when he retired.
43. I know that my parents had financial concerns, particularly when my Dad retired. When he could, my Dad diversified into other areas of work and my parents had to focus on other ways of bringing in income, which was manageable with my Dad's health, as he could no longer do physical jobs. One such way was fostering and the farm was conacred out to another local farmer.
44. Growing up, I knew my parents were under financial pressure, but I wasn't old enough to fully understand why.
45. I do not know what my parent's current financial situation is and my siblings and I worry about how they will cope in the future financially, as I know they do not have adequate finances such as pensions in place for the future.
46. In terms of my Dad's future care needs, my siblings and I all feel a sense of responsibility towards our Dad and we have discussed how we will cope if my Dad deteriorates and requires a lot of care. If he needed us, my siblings and I would always be there for him and we would find a way to ensure he is comfortable.
47. Lucy and I live very close to our Dad, so we will help with care if my Dad needs it in the future. I have discussed with my husband the fact that I may need to become my Dad's carer in the future, which may impact my ability to work and our finances. Fortunately, my husband is very understanding about this. Lucy and I know there may be a time when he may need to live with one of us.
48. I don't believe my Dad's Hepatitis C infection has affected my education, but it could have if my parents had not had the finances. My parents wanted to ensure that my siblings and I received the best education possible and if I needed academic help, they did their best to help me. My secondary education was completed at a grammar school and I obtained a university

degree. I am grateful that I had a good education. I now have a very good job. I do know if my parents had not been able to provide the finances, I would not have been able to attend my Grammar School due to the fees and therefore I would not have been able to attend University.

49. I have registered my Dad as a dependant of mine at work, as well as my daughter. This enables me to take dependency leave if something were to happen to him and I wouldn't have to take it as sick leave.

### **Section 6. Treatment/care/support.**

50. I was too young to know if my parents faced difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment, care and support and I refer to my Dad's statement regarding this.

51. It would definitely have helped if our family had been given support in the past.

52. I don't think my Dad has ever talked to anyone about his Hepatitis C infection, what he has been through because of it and the talk of other infections he may have contracted. He and my Mum are very close, but emotionally I do not know where he is at. He can become very emotional at times if we discuss things from the past. I believe my Dad should be getting support now.

53. I believe my Dad suppresses how being infected with Hepatitis C has physically and emotionally impacted him and continues to impact him today.

54. I have never been offered any support.

55. I do not believe that sufficient attention has been paid to the long term emotional and mental impact on those whose loved ones have been infected by contaminated blood. The issue has not been addressed and needs to be adequately considered. I also do not think that the physical and mental impact on those who have been infected like my Dad has been adequately considered.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

56. I am unaware of any financial assistance my parents may have received and I refer to my Dad's statement regarding financial assistance.

57. I have not received any financial assistance from any of the trusts or funds.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

58. People want to see those responsible brought to justice. Those people who are living good healthy lives, with good wages and pensions, whilst people like us have suffered. Some of those people are probably still practising, which is the most worrying thing.

59. As a family, and on a personal level, our faith and trust in the medical profession has been shattered. There is meant to be trust between doctors and patients, but I have never felt that attachment. I do not know whether I can believe what medical professionals say.

60. My Dad put his faith in the professionals who essentially played God. The doctors took away my Dad's choice when they gave him infected blood. They made decisions for him that had catastrophic consequences on his health, his life and his family. They abused their position and it was morally wrong, yet nobody has been held accountable for what happened. My Dad and the other victims of infected blood deserve justice.

61. To a certain extent, the doctors essentially gave my Dad a death sentence when they gave him infected blood. It is a miracle that my Dad is still alive considering what his body had been through. We count ourselves as one of the lucky families so far. I am so grateful that my Dad was able to walk me down the aisle and see my daughter.

62. I am sceptical about the doctors saying there was very little they could do about infected blood. I feel there were things that could have been done to

help patients. The fact they never disclosed to patients the risks of being given the blood was morally wrong and an abuse of their position.

**Anonymity**

63. I do not wish to be anonymous and I would be prepared to give oral evidence to the Inquiry. I will only be available to attend the Inquiry's oral hearings in Belfast on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2019, due to my work commitments.

**Statement of Truth**

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

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

Dated..... 25/04/19 .....