Witness Name: Maria Blacklock
Statement No.: WITN4520001
Exhibits: **WIT4520002 - 4**
Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARIA BLACKLOCK

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 31 July 2019.

I, Maria Blacklock, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is **Maria Blacklock** and I was born on GRO-C 1958. My husband **Peter Blacklock,** now deceased, was born on GRO-C 1959. My address is known to the Inquiry. I am currently physically and mentally unable to work.

2. When I met my husband, Peter in 1995 he was fine. We got married in 1996, and about two years later in 1998, he started to become unwell, with what we thought was the flu at the time.

3. I intend to speak about my husband's Hepatitis C infection. In particular, the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him, the treatment he received and the impact it had on Peter and our life together.

Section 2. How Affected

4. According to Peter's family, Peter was involved in a hit and run accident when he was around 9 years old. He was bleeding from the ear and sustained cuts, bruises, head injuries and back injuries.

5. This was around 1968, he was hospitalised and in a coma for two weeks so he had no recollection of this period. He was treated at Mansfield General Hospital, where all of the American soldiers were being taken care of.

6. Peter's sister Margit also confirms that he received a blood transfusion at this time.

7. Peter was never an intravenous drug user and he had no tattoos or piercings.

8. In 1998, Peter started to become very unwell so he was admitted onto a ward at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. After being placed in an isolation ward at first, he was released with a diagnosis of glandular fever.

9. In 2000, we had to go back to the hospital as he began feeling unwell again. This time he was diagnosed with Hepatitis C. I can't remember but I think by around three years since he had first become ill, his condition had deteriorated quickly.

10. Dr Maine at St Charles Hospital in Ladbroke Grove, diagnosed Peter with Hepatitis C. He stated that this was quite a new disease but there was a treatment available for him.

11. I think they prescribed a combination of Ribavirin and Interferon for one year. He had to take one tablet of Ribavirin a day and administer an injection in the stomach, once a week, which he did himself.

12. At first the drugs seemed to be working because his blood count started coming down, but after about 9 months his blood count started rising again. He could not work, his hair fell out and he was sweating profusely.

13. Even though the drugs did not seem to be working, and his blood count was rising, they left him alone because he wasn't feeling too bad. The doctor's only advice was to not drink too much alcohol, and that he "would be fine because his condition was not life threatening".

14. In 2003, Peter had a liver biopsy. I remember this because my father and Peter had to go in for liver biopsies on the same day. Sadly, my father passed away one week later. On the day of my father's funeral Peter was experiencing terrible flu symptoms so we had to call a doctor to check on him that night. The doctor gave him antibiotics and intravenous fluids and he started to feel better.

15. Over the next two years his condition remained stable. He was tired all the time but it was not as bad as when he had the first round of Hepatitis C treatment.

16. Around 2005, we decided that I could move to America. Peter would travel between America and the UK as he was not feeling too bad, but he had to remain primarily in the UK to take care of his ageing parents.

17. I have given the Investigators 3 photographs **WITN4520002-4** which highlight the changes in Peter weight over the years.

WITN4520002	Wedding photo of Peter & Maria 1996
WITN4520003	Taken in 2008 or 2009. Peter looking heavy with fluid
WITN4520004	Taken 31.12.2013 – Peter having lost a lot of weight.

18. By 2009, Peter began to look extremely swollen. See **WITN4520003**.

19. In England, Dr Maine at St Charles advised that there was nothing they could do, he had to live with it.

20. Not long after this, Peter began residing permanently in England. While apart, he would call me every morning. On 2 August 2013, Peter did not call me and I immediately knew something was wrong because I could not get in touch with him.

21. I learnt that during a visit to Peter's 90-year-old father at his sheltered accommodation in Nottingham, the veins in Peter's oesophagus had burst. He had been vomiting blood but by the time help arrived, the warden had found Peter unresponsive. He was then taken and admitted into intensive care at Kingsmill hospital.

22. At the time, I was running a successful hairdressing business in the US. I organised and packed up the rented premises within a month. I had to give a lot of things to charity and let my employees go. I returned to the UK with very little money.

23. Sometime in September after Peter was out of Kingsmill Hospital, it happened again. This time, a neighbour called the ambulance and he

was taken to Hammersmith Hospital in Paddington. He later discharged himself that evening.

24. A few days later after the incident, I took him to the liver department at St Mary's Hospital. His oesophagus was bandaged and we were informed that he would require a liver transplant.

25. From thereon, we had to attend St Mary's every Monday for blood tests and every two weeks to drain an excess build-up of fluid in his body. We had to take cabs because of Peter's illness but this was financially draining.

26. I was told that he could slip into a coma at any time. He slept most of the time and had no energy. He was also limited to having 1 to 1 and a half litres of fluid daily.

27. After several months of waiting, Peter was called in to have a liver transplant surgery on 13 February 2014 at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead. I was sent home before the surgery and was informed that Peter did not have a bed because he may not survive the 10-hour operation.

28. After the surgery, he was no longer jaundiced and he stated that he had not felt that good in years. Eventually he came out of hospital and was doing really well.

29. Peter still needed treatment for the Hepatitis C infection but we were told that his liver was not bad enough for him to get treatment. We contacted our local MP Karen Buck, who wrote to the hospital on our behalf.

30. Peter had to wait two years to receive treatment for Hepatitis C, by this time his new liver was also damaged. In 2016, while undergoing

treatment for Hepatitis C the doctors noticed markers in his blood which were later diagnosed as cancer.

31. The markers suggested that it could be liver or testicular cancer but after numerous tests they still could not prove this. Finally, I suggested that they carry out a PET scan, the results of which showed that the cancer cells were in the crevices of his chest and lungs.

32. We were referred to Hammersmith Hospital for the cancer. Peter was uncomfortable and in pain by this time. It hurt when he laid down and he could not sleep. He kept wandering around, all the time.

33. In August 2016, the doctor informed us that there was nothing more they could do. She said "I'm afraid there's nothing we can do. It is terminal".

34. They gave him chemotherapy to treat the cancer, but because he was on anti-rejection tablets for his new liver they had to lower the dose, which lowered his immunity. He caught an infection which was treated with fluids and antibiotics and he was able to leave the hospital.

35. By the end he could hardly walk, he was yellow and bloated. The whole thing was horrific. The doctors at St Mary's and Charing Cross Hospitals got him into St Elizabeth's Hospice in St John's Wood.

36. Peter died on 3 October 2016 and we were given a copy of the death certificate.

Section 3. Other Infections

37. I do not believe that Peter was infected with anything other than Hepatitis C as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

38. As far as I am aware, no treatment or tests were conducted on Peter without his, or my knowledge.

Section 5. Impact

39. We did not have a lot of money, Peter could not work because of his Hepatitis C and subsequent liver cirrhosis, and was subsisting on jobseekers allowance.

40. He was embarrassed by the liver cancer because he did not want people thinking he was a drinker. The stigma surrounding Hepatitis C also meant that "people would think you got it from injecting drugs or funny sex. They won't believe you if you say contaminated blood so you just stop telling anyone".

41. Before receiving treatment for Hepatitis C, Peter had very bad flu-like symptoms. The sweating was terrible and I had to keep changing the sheets every few hours. He couldn't eat because he had no appetite.

42. After he started treatment, most of his hair fell out. Peter would try to be normal for me, especially when my dad was ill, but that would take its toll on him.

43. My friend Vanessa, who accompanied me to the interview says that, "Maria and Peter never had a wide circle of friends. We were each other's best friends and world. Maria only met us and opened up to us through a carers network. He was worried about her and she was worried about him"

44. Peter's illness and caring for him also put pressure on our relationship. Our sex life disappeared and that was hard for both of us. The anti-rejection tablets gave Peter incontinence and on one occasion, on a

journey to Nottingham he had an accident so we had to stop by the shops and buy him new track bottoms. This was very embarrassing for him.

45. Not long after Peter's transplant, I tore my ACL. Pushing Peter around in a wheelchair increased the pressure placed on my other leg.

46. I am left with no one now, I have no brothers or sisters to look after me, and I no longer recognise myself.

47. I am not working now because I am mentally and physically unable to. I currently live in the third floor of a building and there is no lift which makes it hard for me to get around. I have been on the waiting list for a transfer for 3 years now.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

48. Peter was placed on a waiting list before he received the first round of Hepatitis C treatment. The treatment involved taking a Ribavirin tablet a day and injecting himself in the stomach once a week. He would feel ill after the injection for about a week and by the time he started to feel better he would have to take the next one.

49. He was depressed and worried but no one offered us any counselling, care or support. They just had a 'get on with it' attitude.

50. Peter had to wait 16 years between the first and second round of Hepatitis C treatment. He was given a liver transplant after Hepatitis C damaged his liver, but even after that we had to contact our MP Karen Buck for help to push the hospital to give Peter the treatment, which we had to wait two years for.

51. I believe that Peter was given Harvoni and Ribavirin for the second round of treatment. The doctors kept mentioning how expensive the treatment was and blamed it on NICE.

52. By the time he received the treatment his new liver was also damaged. In 2016, while undergoing treatment for Hepatitis C the doctors noticed markers in his blood later diagnosed as cancer.

53. The doctors and dentists were aware of his condition so he did not have any problems with these services. I am friendly with the liver nurse who looked after Peter in outpatient care and recently she mentioned to me that he was two weeks away from dying if he had not received the liver transplant.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

54. I am not sure how I found out about the Skipton Fund, probably from the liver hospitals or doctors.

55. Peter and I applied for financial assistance from the Skipton Fund in January 2016. We applied with a supporting letter from one of the consultants caring for Peter. The Skipton Funds Appeals Panel rejected the application on 29 November 2016, stating that there was no record of a blood transfusion in Peter's medical notes.

Section 8. Other Issues

56. Peter changed his name from George Peter Coller, which was also his father's name, to Peter Blacklock, by deed poll.

57. I went to visit Peter's mom at Kingsmill Hospital in Nottingham. We had been informed that the medical records had been transferred to Kingsmill, so we thought that this would be a good opportunity to obtain Peter's medical records.

58. The old hospital had been knocked down and allegedly documents had been found lying around, including patient records and these were handed over to Kingsmill Hospital.

59. The receptionist at Kingsmill Hospital informed us that the records had all been destroyed. "I remember coming in one weekend and them telling us to destroy everything". I asked her if the information could have been transferred onto a disk and she replied saying "we were not told to do that, we were just told to destroy them all. I have confirmation from Karen Buck that the hospital said that the records had been destroyed.

60. Peter's death certificate said the cause of death was 'Cancer - Unknown Primary'. The doctors didn't say this but I believe that it was the liver cells that turned cancerous and flew up to Peter's chest cavity.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 10/10/20