

Witness Name: Dr Joanne McClean

Statement No.: WITN7311008

Exhibits: TBC

Dated: 13/02/2024

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

THIRD STATEMENT OF DR JOANNE MCCLEAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 Request of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 15 January 2024.

I, Dr Joanne McClean, will say as follows: -

1. The PHA has undertaken a regular programme of proactive messaging to highlight the risk of hepatitis B and C spread and offering advice on how to reduce that risk. Since November 2022 the PHA issued the following press release on World Hepatitis Day, alongside social media posts with animated infographics and videos highlighting associated risk factors for Hepatitis B and C and promoting screening for these infections. In addition to this, a number of outreach testing events were planned in hostels across Northern Ireland and open screening offer made to the general public in city centre location in Belfast.
2. The focus of the actions from the Hepatitis C Elimination Plan continues to be on the largest at-risk group in Northern Ireland, namely those at risk through injecting drug use or committal to prison.

3. Screening for HCV is available through a range of clinical services across Northern Ireland including GP practices; community addiction services; genitourinary medicine services, hepatology, inclusion health and A&E. Opt-out testing has also been introduced as part of the initial assessment on prison committal and when risk factors are identified during health assessments in police custody.
4. In order to enhance BBV screening across Northern Ireland, PHA in collaboration with the Regional Virology Laboratory have designed and recently distributed a survey to identify possible areas for improvement, including the introduction of screening through low threshold services who are extensively involved in the routine care and follow up of people who inject drugs.
5. Since November 2022, inclusion health services have extended into all Trusts in Northern Ireland and are commissioned to offer healthcare to people experiencing homelessness. The inclusion health teams are extensively involved in supporting BBV screening and engagement into specialist care for this vulnerable community.
6. HCV treatment has been predominantly delivered through specialist hepatology services in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) as a regional service. Aligned with the Hepatitis C Elimination Plan, the regional hepatology team have been liaising closely with other clinical specialties to support clinical assessment and treatment initiation in other settings. As a result of this, community addiction services in BHSCT are successfully supporting patients through HCV treatment. Discussions are ongoing with other regional clinical specialties (inclusion health and community addictions team) to introduce this pathway across other Trusts and within prison healthcare.
7. PHA are aware of an NHS screening pilot introduced in England to locate those who may have been infected with HCV but are undiagnosed. This

screening is conducted through an electronic search of GP health records for a number of key Hepatitis C risk factors such as historic blood transfusions i.e.

- i. Women born between 1945 and 1964 who received a blood transfusion in childbirth;
 - ii. Men and women born between 1975 and 1984 who received a transfusion in childhood; and
 - iii. Men and women born between 1965 and 1974 who received a transfusion as a child or young adult.
8. Whilst PHA would welcome an initiative such as this in Northern Ireland, it would need to be done in collaboration with GPs across Northern Ireland and would require support and investment to complete. Consideration of how the searches could be conducted is still to be explored with the various stakeholders.
9. Before making any injudicious decisions in developing services or interventions to support individuals infected with HCV through infected blood or infected blood products, PHA are awaiting recommendations from the Infected Blood Inquiry to ensure our response is evidence-based and aligned to other UK nations.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 13.02.24

