Witness Name: Benjamin Neil Griffiths
Statement No: WITN7367001
Exhibits: **WITN7367002 - 004**
Dated: 17 April 2023

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN NEIL GRIFFITHS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 11 October 2022.

I, Benjamin Neil Griffiths, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Benjamin Neil Griffiths. My date of birth is GRO-C 1983. I live in Dubai and my full address is known to the Inquiry. My birth name was Benjamin Neil Griffiths but I used to be known as Benjamin Fielder and some of my medical records refer to me as Benjamin Liam Fielder. Fielder being my mother's maiden name, but in my early 20s I officially reverted my middle and surname to my father's surname of Griffiths.

2. I currently live in Dubai with my partner. I am a project and operations manager for an oil and gas company, and I emigrated to the Middle East in 2013 to support the development of my career.

3. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV"). In particular, the nature of my illness, how it has affected me, the treatment I have received and its impact on me, my family and our lives together.

4. I was a child when these events occurred, so my memory and knowledge of what happened in the early years of my life are limited. I have provided this statement with the support of my mum who has provided some of the information that I was not able to. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge that as time passes, memories can fade so my mother and I have been able to provide approximate timeframes for matters based on life events and these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates and because I was a child at the time of my operation.

5. I confirm that I am not currently legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement. I have had the Inquiry's Anonymity process explained to me but I do not wish my statement to be anonymous.

6. The Inquiry Investigator has also explained the Inquiry's statement of approach and 'Right to Reply' procedure. I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

Section 2. How Infected

7. My parents separated when my brother and I were very young, so my brother and I used to spend the weekends at our dad's house.

8. One Sunday afternoon on 19 May 1991, when I was eight years old, my brother and I were outside riding pushbikes around when my dad called us in for dinner. I turned the handlebars on my bike quickly, and the handlebar knocked into my stomach but did not penetrate the skin. I went

inside but felt a little unwell and could not eat my dinner. Later that day, our dad took us back to our mother's house in GRO-C, Suffolk.

9. The same day I was feeling unwell, so my mother called our local GP. The GP said there was probably nothing to worry about and I would be fine. Later that night, I began coughing up blood, and my mother rushed me to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

10. At the hospital, my mother was informed that I would require a pancreatectomy to remove the tail of my pancreas. I had lost a lot of blood and was given a blood transfusion. Afterwards, I remained in hospital for about two weeks before I was discharged to recover and recuperate at home. The operation was carried out on 20 May 1991.

11. It took some time to recover from the operation, but life returned to normal afterwards. I still have a large scar along my stomach where the doctors cut me open to operate.

12. During my childhood, I suffered from some other minor illnesses and was admitted to Addenbrooke's Hospital about five times by the age of 8, between January 1985 and April 1991.

13. In 1996, my mum took me to our local GP because I had a wart on my finger and she was looking into getting this frozen to remove it. We had recently moved house at that time, and our new GP, Dr GRO-D of Hemsby Medical Centre near Great Yarmouth, looked at my medical records and asked my mum if I had received a blood transfusion during the surgery at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

14. My mum explained my medical history, and he advised that I should be tested for HCV. I cannot recall where the HCV test was carried out, but I remember that we were told the results of the test in a face-to-face meeting with Dr GRO-D

15. The results came back positive, which came as a shock to my mum at the time. I was about 12 years old, so I did not really understand the gravity of the news. However, I recognised that my mum was very upset about it and was hysterical. Mum has confirmed that I was not provided regular appointments by the NHS but she arranged appointments for tests based on research she had done or people she had spoken to.

16. We spent a lot of time at the doctor's, traveling back and forth between home and different hospitals (Royal Free, London, Colman Hospital, Norwich) for repeated blood tests to monitor HCV in my system. I recall blood tests being carried out every year and I recall I attended every 6 months to a year for routine blood tests.

17. I do not think that I understood the importance or gravity of the diagnosis at 12 or 13. I know that HCV was being compared to HIV at that time and my mum was extremely worried.

18. I have recently been tested for HCV, which I go into more detail later, and it would appear that I have now cleared the virus naturally. I have never been offered any treatment for HCV.

Section 3. Other Infections

19. I do not believe I received any infection other than HCV due to being given infected blood or blood products. I know that I was tested for HIV at the same time that I was tested for HCV and the results were negative.

Section 4. Consent

20. No one informed my mum of any risks associated with receiving blood or a blood transfusion at the time of my operation.

Section 5. Impact

21. I was first admitted to Addenbrooke's Hospital on 24 January 1985 to have a squint operation on my left eye. I also had a cataract removed when I was four years old. When I was about seven or eight years old, I had to have my tonsils removed, which was also done at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

22. Following the tonsillectomy operation, I suffered from severe bleeding, so I returned to Addenbrooke's Hospital and was admitted as an in-patient on this occasion. I also suffered from multiple episodes of chest and respiratory infections during my childhood. According to my medical history sheet which I recently acquired, I was diagnosed with Human Papilloma virus (HPV) - skin warts in 1995, and this was when I came to be diagnosed with HCV. The medical history sheet also records that I suffered from itchy skin and eczema and urticaria (hives). Urticaria is strongly linked to HCV and it is my understanding that both eczema and skin conditions can be attributable to HCV.

23. After my diagnosis with HCV in May 1996, Dr GRO-D did not provide us with adequate information on managing the risks to others potentially contracting HCV. There was no advice given to us about managing cuts, bleeding, sharing toothbrushes or dietary advice. I don't believe that my mother was advised to inform my dentist that I had HCV either. We were not referred to any hospitals for follow up appointments and my mum and I were left in the dark to deal with this.

24. I believe Dr GRO-D also suggested that the infection might clear itself, given that I was very young at the time of my diagnosis. He told my mum that if I tested negative by the age of 25, that was how we would know that I had cleared the infection. However, my mother has confirmed that no follow up appointments were ever offered so my HCV infection was not monitored and never has been, since first diagnosis.

25. I lived at home until I was 21 and was still testing positive during this period. I cannot confirm that I was testing positive from routine blood

test, therefore only from my medical notes which show that I was still testing positive for HCV.

26. My mother has confirmed that follow up appointments were not arranged by the NHS but my mum arranged these where she thought was the best place to get tested or advised to go.

27. I have been able to obtain some of my medical records from my old GP, and I exhibit these as **WITN7367002** and **WITN7367003**. Exhibit WITN7367002 from my patient records the following, "Active Problem: Hepatitis C (08 Feb 1996 - Ongoing) - Hepatitis C Exposed at time of pancreatectomy 08 Feb 1996". (**WITN7367002**) The first page of my patient record, under the section headed Journal, records a reminder/alert dated 20 August 2008, which states, Reminder/Alert: 20/08/2008 "Patient is Hepatitis C Positive - Priority: High". (**WITN7367003**) Recently when I contacted the Royal Free Hospital to request any of my medical records which may be held there, I received a letter dated 18 November 2022 from the Health Records Team apologising and stating that they had been unable to locate any records. I exhibit this letter as **WITN7367004**.

28. I believe that when I was in my early twenties, it was confirmed that I had been cleared of HCV. However, my mother is unable to remember when or if I cleared the virus. I did not consider getting a test done to confirm, and I did not have any follow up appointments regarding HCV after this time.

29. As mentioned earlier, I recently had the same concerns about whether my HCV status could impact my work visa in Dubai. Towards the end of 202 I submitted an application for support to the EIBSS, and I was informed that I was required to have a blood test to confirm whether I still had HCV. I researched it and I think that they now check more for HBV in Dubai. However, it was a really difficult position for me to be put in

given that I live in Dubai and I could potentially have lost my work visa and be required to return to the UK, if the results of the blood tests came back positive. I sought advice from a friend, and they confirmed that it could jeopardise my visa so I should not get tested. However, after speaking to an expert haematologist, he advised that the UAE was becoming a little more relaxed about this, so I felt confident to go ahead with the test. Luckily the results of the blood tests confirmed that I am now negative for HCV.

30. My diagnosis with HCV has impacted greatly on me, but I believe it had a more significant impact on my mum. When I was initially diagnosed, she was hysterical because she did not know who to speak to or ask for help. My mum was essentially a single parent raising a child with a potentially life-threatening blood disease along with raising my brother.

31. Following my cycle accident on 19 May 2021, which required me to have pancreatomy surgery the following day, we were no longer allowed to see our father, and that went on for about ten years. My mother blamed my father for what happened to me with regards to the internal injury that I sustained from the bike handlebar incident and my subsequent HCV infection.

32. As a child growing up, I was conscious of cuts and risks to others and became careful if I had a bleed not to let my blood drip everywhere. I still have a fear surrounding cutting myself.

33. When I was an adolescent, I warned any girlfriends I had about my diagnosis. All of them were okay with it, but I told them just in case it came as a shock to the system for them. It caused me a great deal of anxiety, especially when I was young and perhaps naive. I used to get incredibly stressed and anxious about confessing this deeply personal and disturbing secret to them.

34. My diagnosis is something I feel I have to tell a partner before we have sex or the relationship begins to get serious. It is always in your head, considering whether or not it is the right time to tell someone new. I would describe it as a wave of anxiety that comes over you, and you get hot and flustered the moment before you say to any partner what you're infected with. Then following telling them, I might feel relief, but then it can come as a shock to the other person.

35. Luckily for me, my partners have been okay with the knowledge of my diagnosis. I imagine it would have been a horrific experience if something had ever gone sour, perhaps after telling a distant family member or friend. Especially when I was younger, if the wrong person had found out, it could have been deeply upsetting and traumatic, given how young people can behave and react and this is what I was always afraid of.

36. I have no recollection of anyone telling me not to tell other people, but I mostly kept the information to myself because I did not feel like telling people. I have not told friends about it. My mum has told close family members, but we have had no issues arising from that.

37. My mum blamed my dad for the accident, so my dad could no longer see us, which had an impact on the entire family. My brother was unable to see my dad too, and my mum had to care for us on her own.

38. It became a hostile situation after the accident and the surgery. We had zero contact with dad after that, and I never knew that was the reason until we were older, and I made the adult choice to get in touch with my dad. By that point, a lot of time had gone by, but I believe my dad was made aware when I was diagnosed with HCV.

39. I knew my mother's reasons, but there was nothing my brother and I could do about not seeing our father. It has had a massive psychological impact on me and my brother, but we have accepted it as just how things

turned out. We missed out on having our dad for a large part of our formative years.

40. When I turned 20, I changed my name back to Benjamin Neil Griffiths. It took a long time to process, and I believe I was about 25 when the name change became official.

41. My HCV diagnosis had a financial impact on our family as my Mum had to take many days off to commit to medical appointments and our mother was unable to commit to a full time job due to the number of medical appointments following my HCV diagnosis, and this was costly to our family income.

42. I was concerned when I had to prepare to travel to the UAE for work, and conscious of my HCV infection because you have to have blood tests. I was anxious they could be testing for HCV, but fortunately, it was fine, and they didn't carry out tests for HCV. However, as previously mentioned, I recently had to take an HCV test as requested by the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) when I enquired about applying for financial assistance. This was really difficult for me as I had the same worries as before, from when I first came to Dubai and underwent the health checks for my job. Because if the test had come back positive, or if it became known what I was being tested for, it could have had dire consequences for me and I could lose my visa and my job and have to leave Dubai. I asked a friend for advice and he suggested who I could go to for a test, to safeguard against any repercussions for the aforementioned reasons.

43. I do not feel the need to declare that I was diagnosed with HCV on documentation such as a mortgage application or travel insurance, so there has been no impact in terms of that.

44. I was advised not to drink alcohol after the surgery due to the partial loss of my pancreas. I drink the occasional glass of wine, but I am not a drinker.

45. I feel like there should have been a plan in place to continue monitoring me following the HCV diagnosis. I should have been provided with an explanation for what had happened to me and reassured about my health. If anything has happened over the years in terms of follow up appointments, it was down to my mum pursuing it.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

46. No one referred me for any treatment or informed me of the options available to me. I was never given any treatment to clear HCV. We were given no information and have essentially been left in the dark since my diagnosis with HCV. My mother has confirmed that no follow up appointments were ever made to monitor my condition nor was any treatment offered to clear the virus.

47. After my diagnosis with HCV in May 1996, as mentioned earlier, Dr GRO-D did not provide us with adequate information about managing the risk of infection to others. We were given no advice about managing cuts, bleeding, sharing toothbrushes nor given any dietary advice. I don't believe that my mother was advised to inform my dentist that I had HCV either. We were not referred to any hospitals for follow up appointments and my mum and I were left in the dark to deal with it.

48. No one ever informed us about the availability of counselling or psychological support. If we had been made aware of this, it could have potentially been helpful for my mum, who was having to deal with this on her own as a single parent.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

49. My Mum was not aware of the Skipton fund at the time.

50. I do not know if my mum was ever made aware of the various financial support schemes available to people who have been impacted by contaminated blood.

51. As mentioned earlier, I recently made an application to the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) in late 2022. I found them unhelpful during my initial contact and I was given conflicting advice as you don't get to speak to the same person. So, there is miscommunication because you have to deal with so many people. So far, I have spoken to 5 different people who appear to be Assessors and I have been given no constant point of contact. As a result, I have been given different advice and different requests from the following EIBSS employees. GRO-D, initially told me because I had cleared the virus, I would not be eligible to apply. This was totally wrong information.

52. I have also been in contact with GRO-D GRO-D. I was initially told to send my application form electronically for approval prior to sending the hard copies to them in the post. Due to the high cost of sending documents securely form Dubai, as there is no real postal service because it takes so long, I asked them to check that I had completed everything correctly, and I was told that my forms were all okay. Therefore, I sent in hard copies as requested, at great personal expense, costing me £100, but only to be told later that they were incomplete, which resulted in an additional personal cost to me of approximately another £100.

53. Presently GRO-D appears to be contesting my application for support.

54. I was also told that I needed to submit the results of the blood test they had instructed me to have taken, which cost me around £200 to have done in Dubai. The blood tests I had to submit were mostly covered by insurance, however I still had to cover up to £200. Surely, my HCV

diagnosis which is clearly stated in my medical records, and any other information they required, could have been gathered from these records? My medical history record clearly states in an entry from 1996, that I was exposed to HCV during my pancreatomy surgery and that I was still testing positive.

55. As mentioned, the blood test in Dubai was extremely difficult for me to arrange as I risked losing my visa and my job if the result had come back positive. I have no idea why this was requested but I think that the blood test was to prove that I hadn't developed cirrhosis in connection with the Stage 2 payment.

Section 8. Other Issues

56. I would like to see some justice for the people who have been impacted by the history of contaminated blood in the UK. Even if this is not monetary, I would like to see a resolution in my lifetime.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 17.04.23