Witness Name: Angela Irons
Statement No.: WITN1910001
Exhibits: WITN1910002-
WITN1910003
Dated: 3 October 2019

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANGELA IRONS
INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is Angela Irons. My date of birth is GRO-C 1968. My address is known to the Inquiry.

Section 2 : How Infected

2. I had a blood transfusion in 1985 following the birth of my first son. I was just over 16.

3. The delivery was by forceps and I was not feeling very well and the next day they came and said that I was anaemic, and I needed a blood transfusion. **[WITN1910002]**. I have read this in my medical records. I received 2 units of blood on GRO-C.

4. I was not told of any risks in relation to the blood being contaminated.

5. If somebody had told me about the risks of the blood being contaminated, I would have taken some time to think about whether I wanted to have the blood transfusion which might have included me asking some more questions. If I had been told about the risks and I had taken some time to think about the risks I might not have received the same blood; I might have received blood that was not contaminated. I can confirm that the risks were not discussed with my parents; nothing about my treatment, including me needing a blood transfusion, was discussed with them at any time.

6. The transfusion took place at Dryburn Hospital in Durham. It no longer exists as Dryburn Hospital but is now University Hospital of North Durham.

7. I have read my medical records and I find it very strange that some of the notes relating to the blood transfusion are written in thick black writing which is different to the rest of the writing. The notes record that my Hb levels were 9.1. The record then goes on to state in black pen *transfusion of two units of blood.* The record dated GRO-C 1985 then goes on to state, once again in bold, *IB therapy commenced at 17:00 hours. I have two units transfused. IB therapy ↓ when completed.*

8. On GRO-C 1985 my notes go on to state *second unit of blood commenced at 21:30 hours. Observations satisfactory.*

9. I can remember sitting on the bed after giving birth and I felt really dizzy. I did not have any other symptoms. I do not think I was actually bleeding. I just felt dizzy. At no time, either before or after the transfusion, was any information or advice provided to me or my parents about the risk of being exposed to infection.

10. I was infected as a result of a blood transfusion

11. I found out I had HCV in 2000. I had been feeling poorly for a long time. I was constantly tired, dizzy and sick. I generally did not feel well. I had aches and pains. I went to the doctors on several occasions over the years **[WITN1910003]**. The doctors kept saying it was depression and gave me anti-depressants and things like that; I was told to *get on with it.*

12. I think I first went to the doctor not long after having my son. I can remember that not long after having my son, I was tired all the time. I was sitting around with my nightie on most days after having my son and my mum had to take over looking after him.

13. I had my second child on GRO-C 1986. When we had our Christmas dinner on 25 December, I remember I was just sitting there with my nightie on at the table. I just did not want to do anything. I was so tired all the time.

14. I kept going to see the doctor and I would explain that I was feeling cold, tired and generally very unwell, but and the doctors that worked at the surgery put it down to depression. Then I went to the surgery and saw a locum doctor. He said he would do a test. He did not say what the test was for and he said that he did not expect the test to reveal anything.

15. I cannot remember now, but I think I received a letter or possibly a member of staff from the surgery telephoned me to tell me that I needed to see the doctor. I saw the same doctor - the locum - and he told me I had Hepatitis C. He said he had to send a letter to the Health Authority because HCV was a notifiable disease. I had to complete a questionnaire and everything about how I felt into the survey.

16. The locum doctor did not give me any information about HCV. None of the doctors at the surgery gave me any information. I was abandoned and left completely alone. I was left clueless without any information or support. Everything I found out and all the information I managed to gather I found on the internet.

17. I was new to the internet and so it took me a long time to find information on the internet. Staff at the doctors' surgery did not provide any leaflets; I received nothing from them. I was told I had HCV and then left high and dry. I did not receive and counselling or support. All the information I have received has been through my own research and off the internet.

18. I think sometime later, I cannot recall how much later, I was told to contact all my ex-partners in case they had HCV. I might have received a leaflet at this time, but I am not sure.

19. No one spoke with me about any possible risks of infecting my children or family member. I was not told how to keep my children safe. I was not advised to have my children tested. GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C.

Section 3 : Other Infections

20. As far as I am aware, I have only been infected with HCV.

Section 4 : Consent

21. I do not think that I have ever been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent.

Section 5 : Impact

22. I have not had a life. I have not been able to do what I want to do as I have been too tired. I feel like I am in a world of my own most of the time. I spend my time thinking why was it me? If only they had tested me and diagnosed me earlier I would have been able to get treatment earlier, I would not have had all of these years where I have not been able to play with the kids or do anything, go anywhere with them.

23. I had to get my mum and dad to look after my son because I was too tired to look after him; they took responsibility for him when he was younger. I missed out on the children growing up. I had no energy.

24. I knew something was seriously wrong with me. However, doctors just kept telling me I was depressed, but I knew it was more than depression. I knew it in myself it was more than depression; the doctors would not listen.

25. I had the treatment in 2014-2015. The treatment was interferon, copegus and boceprevir. The treatment was horrendous, it really was horrendous. It made me sick, I lost loads of weight. I lost tons of weight because I could not eat, I felt ill all the time. When taking the treatment, I had to eat fatty foods with the medication at 6.00 am and 11.00 pm, it was horrible. It was horrendous as I was injecting myself as well.

26. I was out of it; I slept most of the time because I could not do anything. I couldn't get up, brush my hair, I felt I could not do anything. It was just awful, flu like symptoms, tiredness. I kept on with the treatment because I thought that after I finished the treatment, I would feel a lot better afterwards, but I felt worse than I did before, a lot worse. The treatment worked and I cleared the virus in 2015.

27. However, I now have chronic fatigue and I ache a lot more, really aching all over. I have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. My asthma is a lot worse than it was. I am just so tired all the time, so tired. So, although I have cleared the virus the long-term damage of having HCV and the treatment has left me with many awful symptoms and conditions.

28. Since having the treatment, I have low platelet count, joint hyper mobility, mitral valve prolapse, eczema dermatitis, Sjogrens (an autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks glands that secrete fluids like the tear and saliva glands), IBS and my eye sight is worse. I have all of these conditions, I think, because of the treatment.

29. My children missed out on having a mum. It was 15 years after I was diagnosed before I had the treatment. I could not have it before because I had no one there to look after the children. Because medical staff didn't talk to me about the treatments and I only had information from the internet I thought I could not do the treatment while the children were young.

30. I had to wait until they were old enough to be able to look after themselves. I was offered treatment not long after I was diagnosed. I think it was about a year after I was diagnosed so in around 2001, but I felt that I could not risk treatment while the children needed me.

31. In terms of receiving treatment, I remember I went to the Spire Hospital in Washington, because I was having heavy bleeding. I needed to have an operation; it was elective not emergency. I was told that I had to be at the hospital for 3.00 pm for my operation. However, on the day of the operation, when the surgeons found out I had Hepatitis C the anaesthetist, surgeon and others came to the bed and I was told that it was too big a risk to go in at 3.00pm because there would be people after me. I had to wait for the last surgery slot, 7.30 pm. I did not get home until after 11.00 pm because they would not risk. I felt like a leper.

32. I have no problem with the dentist; I have had the same dentist for years. He has said all instruments should be sterile anyway and he would take precautions anyway so it should not matter when a person with HCV is seen. He has been really good. My dentist has never made me go at the end of his list. The dentist says the instruments should already be sterilised so should not make a difference.

33. People with HCV who know they have got HCV but what about people in the middle of the list – what about if they have HCV but don't know? Surely the equipment should be sterilised enough to make sure that everyone is covered.

34. I felt I could not go anywhere which involved drinking out of a cup or a glass as I was too scared in case people found out I had Hepatitis C and they thought I could pass it on to them. I thought this even though I knew I could not infect people. I was frightened all the time in case I cut myself and the kids or somebody caught something. I did not tell anyone I had Hepatitis C except for one person. I did not tell anyone because of the stigma associated having HCV; with having "infected blood".

35. I had only told one person and that was after I was diagnosed. It was a friend I knew quite a while at the school gates. She did not speak to me again after I told her; I thought she was a friend.

36. I worked in 1989 but it was only from the June to November. Because I was so tired, I could not work again, so I have been claiming benefits all the time. I got a job in 2013 because DWP declared me fit for work even though I was absolutely shattered. As I was declared me fit for work, I had to go looking for jobs. I got a job as a cleaner in the evening and for a few weeks or months, I was working as a cook in the place as well to build up my hours, so I was full time. However, I had to give that up. I did not tell my employer I had HCV because of the stigma. I had to go for appointments for Hepatitis C treatment before I had the treatment and because I did not tell my boss why I was being off work I was told I couldn't work because I wasn't very reliable.

37. Because of the impact of Hepatitis C on my health both physical and mental I have not been able to work which means that for most of my life I have been on benefits. I have not been able to do all the things I wanted to do with and form my children. I could not do them physically and financially because I only received benefits, I did not have the money. My children have missed out.

Section 6: Treatment/Care/Support

38. I have not faced any difficulties in obtaining treatment.

39. I was not offered any counselling until last year. I keep thinking that the HCV is going to come back even though I have cleared the virus. Every niggle in my side where my liver is makes me worry and in the back of my mind, I think the HCV is back. So, I go to the doctors asking for blood tests to see if it is back and the doctors just say it's alright. However, the last time I was told I needed counselling. I said it's a bit pointless having counselling now because it was years and years ago. I needed the counselling then. I said to the doctors that they need to tell me what the chances are of HCV coming back. However, they don't talk to you about it they just want you out of the room as quickly as possible.

40. I believe it would have been beneficial if I had received counselling when I was infected. No one has talked to me about the risks of it coming back. Because I cleared the virus, I do not receive any follow up treatment or anything; this is incredibly worrying. I wish I had a check every 6 months or a year.

41. I have been told I have a 1cm cyst on my liver, but that has not been followed up or anything. As a result of my clearing the virus I have been discharged for any follow up for any care or investigations relating to the Hepatitis C, so I am left not knowing whether or not it might have returned or could return as no one has talked to me about the risk of it.

Section 7: Financial Assistance

42. I cannot remember when I found out about the funds, but I know I got £20,000 from the Skipton Fund and I receive monies from the Caxton Foundation as well. I received monies to go to receive my treatment; it was towards travel. I think that was £50 a week whilst I was on the treatment to get taxis because I had to get taxis to Newcastle and being in hospital. I filled in the forms and the

doctor signed it and sent the document off. I have had no problems with the schemes; I am on special category mechanism.

Section 8 : Other Issues

43. I want the Inquiry to get to the bottom of how such a scandal and a tragedy could happen to so many people and why it took so long for people to be diagnosed and told about their illnesses.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

ANGELA IRONS

DATED …3 October 2019….