

Witness Name: Karen Jane Francis

Statement No: WITN4455001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: June 2020

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KAREN JANE FRANCIS

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I, Karen Jane Francis, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Karen Jane Francis. I was born on GRO-C 1961 and I live at GRO-C, Surrey GRO-C
2. My ex-husband, Keith Robert Francis (born on GRO-C 1959), was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) through contaminated blood products. He died on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014, aged 55.
3. My two daughters, Jennifer and Carly, have also provided Witness Statements to the Inquiry (WITN4179001 and WITN4178001 respectively).

4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to Keith's full medical records.

## **Section 2. How Affected**

5. Keith had mild to moderate Haemophilia A. He was treated at the Croydon University Hospital (formerly known as Mayday Hospital), at Lewisham Hospital and at the Kings College Hospital for surgical procedures and dental treatment but he very rarely needed treatment.
6. Keith was told he had HCV sometime in the early to mid 2000s. Prior to that Keith erroneously thought that he was infected with the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV). Keith was treated with Factor VIII (FVIII) concentrate in 1980 at the Mayday Hospital after he was beaten up. He had a bad reaction to it. He was jaundiced, his face was swollen, he was sick and he was exhausted. He had a similar reaction when he was again treated with FVIII concentrate in 1982/83 for a broken hand. He thought the negative reaction to be part and parcel of the FVIII treatment. He explained to me that it (the reaction) was just something that happens when you have FVIII and that his jaundice would pass.
7. When Keith was about to start HCV clearing treatment in the early 2000s, he said to me 'the Hepatitis B has gone now and I have Hep C'. I formed the impression that he had only just been told that he had HCV as he was puzzled as to how he had HBV in place of HCV (and so was I). I believe that he was initially expecting to have just three months of clearing treatment (for HBV) but was subsequently told that he needed six months of treatment instead. I didn't know what to make of it at the time as the difference between 'C' and 'B' to me is just a letter of the alphabet. To Keith it was far more than that. Keith compared his experience of the clearing treatment to a cancer

patient having chemotherapy for six months. It was extremely debilitating for him but he decided to go forward with it for the sake of his life longevity.

8. Keith was one of five brothers and three sisters. Keith and two of his brothers had haemophilia. Both brothers were infected with viruses through contaminated blood products, Derek with HIV and Jeremy with HBV. Derek died in November 1996 after developing AIDS and Jeremy died a couple of years before Keith lost his own life.
9. Keith experienced many bouts of depression in his lifetime until finally committing suicide in 2014. I am in no doubt that his poor state of health caused by the contaminated blood scandal was a significant contributory factor, firstly, to our marriage breakdown and ,secondly, to him taking his own life.

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

10. I do not believe that Keith was infected with anything other than HCV (unless he was also infected with HBV).

### **Section 4. Consent**

11. I do not know whether or not Keith was treated and tested without consent. I remember Keith receiving a letter in the early 1990s informing him of a HIV negative test result. I had no idea that he had been tested for HIV and I am uncertain as to whether or not he was aware of being tested. I just remember the letter arriving and Keith opening it.

## **Section 5. Impact**

12. I knew Keith from the early 1970s and we started seeing each other in 1977. We married in 1983. Jennifer was born in 1985 and Carly was born in 1990. Keith and I separated in late 1993/early 1994 and we divorced in 1999.

13. The 1980s was a horrible bigoted decade. Being married to a haemophiliac was something I didn't talk about ever. I had to protect my children. Haemophilia was associated with HIV and there was a huge amount of speculation, stigma and prejudice to guard ourselves against. I worried a lot about what we might have contracted, including HIV.

14. Keith being infected with hepatitis was always a huge concern to me as was just the basic premise that we might have a daughter who was a haemophilia carrier or children with hepatitis. I wanted to know more about hepatitis before we had children together. We were told that there was no risk at all to me or our children. There was no internet. The knowledge available to us was limited and that door was closed to us. When the girls were born I urgently wanted to know if I and they could be tested for hepatitis. Keith and I were told 'no'. We were told that the children were 'fine' and that they were healthy. I wanted to know what blood group the girls had too as I have a rare blood group but I was told that they don't routinely test for that and that there was no need for it.

15. In relation to my rare blood type, I used to donate blood. Only 2% of the population have the same blood type and my blood donation was always gratefully received. After it came to light that I was married to a haemophiliac with hepatitis, I was told that I could no longer donate blood.

16. Keith suffered with flu-like symptoms, such as muscle aches and a high temperature (fever). He suffered with chronic fatigue, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, nausea, sickness and jaundice.
17. Keith's mental health was very badly affected. He was deeply depressed. When he wasn't overcome with fatigue he would have wild bouts of energy. His ability to make decisions and his behaviour was erratic. He made some extreme life changing decisions, to leave our marriage, to make himself homeless/become a missing person and (ultimately) to take his own life. He would just make a spur of the moment decision and go with it.
18. After Keith and I separated, he came back a few times and he then later just disappeared. The loss of Keith's brother, Derek, to HIV/AIDS was a horrible thing that plagued Keith's mind. He wasn't then able to function with his life in any normal way. He wasn't able to sustain a reliable relationship with our girls and I was left to raise them on my own without much financial support from him. The two girls were just 15 and 10 years old when Keith went missing and I didn't know whether he was alive or dead. The Police wanted to do a TV appeal. I refused them permission. Jennifer was studying for her GCSEs and I felt it would be too much emotional stress to have Keith plastered all over the news.
19. Their father's absence had a huge impact on the children. We struggled with financial hardship. Money was very tight. I had to take on additional hours at work (and an entirely different role) which meant I had less time with the children. I wanted to set a positive example to the girls and show them that a parent is supposed to be there for them. I had to pay the mortgage to keep a roof over our heads. The mortgage was in joint names and I was told that when someone goes missing you are powerless to do anything about your situation for 7 years. I asked one of Keith's brothers to help me clear Keith's

personal effects. We cleared his life away. There was a horror for me in doing that I still remember to this day.

20. I heard nothing from Keith or anything about his whereabouts. Some six months or so later I received a random telephone call out of the blue from Keith asking me if I knew the answer to a quiz question. Keith's first point of direct contact after what I remember to be over a year was to enable him to see Carly at a remote park. It was even longer before Jennifer saw him as she was then old enough to make her own choices and she didn't want to. Carly insisted on wearing a coat that no longer fit her because Keith loved hugging her in it and he always said it made her feel like a teddy bear. Keith was a talented musician. Carly showed a talent for music and I believe she could have been a musician of the same standard to Keith if things had been different. As it was those skills were lost. Carly was living with her father and younger half brother before Keith died. It was terrible for Carly to be the one to find her father when he eventually took his own life. It was horrific for her.

21. Keith and I remained in close contact with each other as parents to our girls even though we were no longer husband and wife. We were both so excited about the prospect of Jennifer having our first grandchild. Both girls have been left devastated by the loss of their father. Jennifer lost her (first) son three months after Keith took his life. It saddens me too that Keith didn't get to be a grandfather. Jennifer has a son with haemophilia and Keith is no longer here to share his first hand knowledge about it with his grandson. He is no longer here to give a first hand account of having HCV to clarify what happened to him to the next generation. Our daughters have been deeply emotionally affected by the loss of their father. He wasn't there as a father should be to walk them down the aisle on their wedding day. I gave one daughter away and my partner gave the other away on her wedding day.

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

22. Keith had a six month course of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

23. I do not know about any financial assistance Keith had from the various trusts and funds.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

24. Living with the knowledge that Keith killed himself has had a huge psychological impact on me, my children, my partner and the wider family. It has left me questioning if I could have done more to prevent his suicide and the inevitable heartache that followed.

## **Anonymity**

25. I do not want to apply for anonymity.

## Statement of Truth

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

Signed....

GRO-C

Dated.....

15 July 2020