Witness Name: Jason Bridges
Statement No.: WITN5337001
Exhibits:
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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JASON BRIDGES

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 20 January 2022.

I, Jason Bridges, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Jason Bridges. My date of birth is GRO-C 1969, and my address is known to the Inquiry. I have been married for 24 years, and my wife and I have two grown-up daughters aged 20 and 21.

2. I intend to speak about my experience with haemophilia and subsequent diagnosis of HIV and Hepatitis C ("HCV") due to treatment with infected blood products, Factor VIII in the 1980s.

3. I was diagnosed with haemophilia at the age of one by the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel. I have been under the care of the Royal London Hospital from the time of my diagnosis as a child up until recently.

4. I intend to speak in particular about the nature of my illness, how it has affected me, the treatment I have received and the impact it has had on me and my family's lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was born in 1969 and diagnosed with severe haemophilia A within a year of my birth. I was infected with HIV and HCV via blood products used to treat my severe haemophilia A. I was under the care of Professor Jackson and his lead consultant Dr Brian Colvin at the Royal London Hospital Trust in Whitechapel.

6. As a child, I was receiving cryoprecipitate treatment which initially had to be infused at the hospital until we were able to store the product in chest freezers at home, which allowed my family to treat bleeds quicker at home without the need to travel to the hospital.

7. This continued for many years until the concentrate Factor VIII was introduced. We were induced into using Factor VIII because it was smaller and easier to store and infuse. I cannot remember the brand name of the concentrate, and I was never informed that the product was manufactured using blood pooled from a wide range of people, which we now know to be from sources not considered to be safe and from a paid for service.

8. I am not clear on the dates or years I was taken from the freezer cryoprecipitate to the Factor VIII concentrate, but it must have been sometime in the late 1970s, as I remember infusing the concentrate by myself while at primary school.

9. Further, based on my understanding of the timelines, this was around the time when patients, including myself, were given a variety of factor VIII concentrates from different sources.

10. I was never actually informed when I was infected, even though I never missed a clinic or hospital appointment in all the years I was at school and when I first started working.

11. I remember being told I was infected with HIV in what was a very run of the mill conversation at my clinic at around 15 years of age with my mother present. It was mentioned as part of the clinic and not mentioned again.

12. I was never asked if I had any questions or given any further information. It was as if I should have been aware already based on the national press at the time. For years, there was no other conversation on the subject after, apart from the need for blood tests at every clinic appointment, which was usual anyway.

13. I'm not actually sure if I took it in what was said at the time or whether I just ignored it as some form of coping mechanism. It was not until about 10-15 years later before there was any real mention of any help or support from the doctors and the hospital.

14. After my initial diagnosis, I continued with my life. When it came time to have sexual partners, I was conscious about being very careful and ensuring we were being safe.

15. After I left school, I started working at the Bank of England, and all of my colleagues knew I was a haemophiliac. It did not take long for the questions to come up regarding my HIV status because it was constantly over the news and TV. However, I just brushed this off as I am generally a happy and buoyant person.

16. I have never really given much thought to how it affected me mentally or emotionally, as I generally just got on with it and pushed it all to the back of my mind and got on with life. It wasn't until the next round of infections started to happen in terms of the HCV infection.

17. Again, I was called in to have a very informal conversation at the clinic, where I was informed that I had been infected with HCV. It still amazes me how they can still get it wrong after all these years. It sometimes feels like because we are such a drain on the NHS resource, it would be easier for the doctors to give us all the varieties of the hepatitis viruses and finish us all off. Again, I was given very little information or resources on how to manage this diagnosis.

18. There are still only a very small number of people who are aware of my entire medical history. My parents and my wife are the only ones who know my status, and a few more people only know I have haemophilia. It is not because I did not want to tell them, but I did not want to be treated any different and therefore led what I considered to be a fairly normal life until 1998 when I was told I needed to go onto an antiretroviral regime.

19. I got married on 25 August 1998, and my wife and I travelled to Kenya for our honeymoon on 26 August. Everything was fine, and I was on medication. However, on my return from our honeymoon, I began feeling unwell. I made several trips to the GP and ended up having to stay at the hospital so they could run a number of tests on me.

20. The doctors could not work out what the problem was at the time, and I was discharged and allowed to go home. On 24 December 1998, I was asked to return to the hospital and was subsequently admitted onto Devonshire ward and taken into a side room. The doctors informed me that my organs were shutting down. They explained that the next 24 hours were critical, and I may not make it out of the hospital alive.

21. The hospital informed me that this was due to a bug I had picked up in Kenya, which affected my immune system. They explained that it had caused my renal and organ failure.

22. I later discovered that they had not run a renal function test at the time and that the antiretroviral drugs had effectively poisoned me, causing the renal failure in the first instance.

23. Luckily, I survived as my body kicked in and rebooted itself. I was in the hospital for a few weeks until I was discharged from the care of the renal clinic.

24. I continued to attend clinics for my haemophilia and HIV, but I never heard from the renal department for about 13 years until I was told I needed a kidney transplant. I believe that I must have fallen off the radar of the renal team.

25. Presently, I have to attend three clinics—one for renal, another for haemophilia and the other for HIV. I continue to deal with these appointments and still hold down a full-time job as I have a family to support.

26. I have recently moved from Royal London Hospital to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford because it is nearer to me. The level of care I have had from the John Radcliffe so far, is already far superior to the Royal London Hospital.

27. My wife will be a living donor for me, and this has moved quicker in two months than it has in five years at the Royal London. In fact, at my last clinic appointment at the Royal London, they asked for my wife's details again as they had not contacted her in two years.

Section 3. Other Infections

I do not believe that I have received any infection other than HIV and HCV due to being given infected blood products.

Section 4. Consent

28. I believe that I may have been treated or tested without my knowledge and without being given adequate or complete information.

Section 5. Impact

29. I had never really given much thought to how my diagnoses affected me mentally or emotionally. I generally just got on with it and pushed it all to the back of my mind. It was necessary, so I could move on with my life. At first, I managed to do this well despite my HIV diagnosis until the next round of infections started to happen, and I was informed I had contracted HCV.

30. The effects that these illnesses have had on my family and me is hard to quantify as we live with it daily and have done so for many years. We keep most of it away from the rest of the family and deal with it all internally in our little bubble. It is something I have done for most of my life, and I try not to let it affect my life to the extent where it takes over.

31. We have suffered a number of financial setbacks over the years as I can only work in a profession where it can be fairly flexible around appointments etc.

32. Although I have received some financial support from the schemes such as the Skipton Fund and the Macfarlane Trust (see below for further details), I still cannot get life insurance to cover my mortgage. In effect, if I die at present, I will leave my family with little or no security apart from the equity in the current house.

33. I was never offered any treatment for the HCV infection, but as mentioned, I started the antiretroviral treatment for HIV in August 1998, which in turn poisoned me.

34. Although I was diagnosed with HCV in the early 2000s, subsequent tests later showed that I no longer had the virus, so I think that I could have cleared it naturally.

35. During my treatment for HIV, I did not have the luxury of taking a break from work because I was the sole earner in the house, and my wife had to stay at home to look after our children. As such, it is difficult to say this affected me, as I just got on with my life, and people were relying on me.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

36. I do not think that counselling or psychological support has ever been made available to me at any stage, before and after my diagnosis.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

37. My parents were part of the group of people who received the initial compensation package, but from what they told me, the solicitors who represented the people affected were adamant that we take the offer from the initial enquiry. They were also instructed to sign the offer or get nothing, and they had to sign a non-disclosure agreement and agree to never take any legal action in the future.

38. I have received financial support from the Macfarlane trust and the Skipton Fund. I first heard about the Skipton Fund from a letter from the Fund. The Fund had addressed it to me at my childhood home, so my parents forwarded the letter to me.

39. I received a stage one payment of £20,000 from the Skipton Fund.

40. The process of applying to the scheme was fine and fairly easy to complete, but this may be because I work in an office and use computers daily, so it seemed fairly straightforward to me.

41. Since the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) has now taken over the financial support arrangement, I currently receive a monthly income of £2244 from the EIBSS.

Section 8. Other Issues

42. I have lived with this problem for over 40 years in some way and have seen many governments deny any knowledge of wrongdoing, but the collusion with the hospital trusts is unforgivable. The level of care and subsequent health issues which the infection has bought onto people is far wider than just the infections received from the blood products.

43. Although the strain and related death wish we all have to live with may be out of the public eye and not in the news, I want the Inquiry to understand that many of us live with the fear of how and when these diseases will finally get us.

44. If we get some kind of financial lump sum to alleviate the burden on my family, I will at least have done my part of securing my family's future. More importantly, like all others who are involved in this Inquiry, I would like some form of government acceptance that the government knew this was happening. Then, they will have to live with the consequences of the public knowing this too.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **GRO-C**

Dated 18-02-22