

Witness Name: SHARON OSBORNE

Statement No: WITN5658001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: APRIL 2021

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SHARON OSBORNE

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I, Sharon Osborne, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sharon Osborne. I was born on GRO-C 1972 and I live at GRO-C
2. My father, William Willis (born on GRO-C 1946), was co-infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) through contaminated blood products. He developed liver cirrhosis and died from liver failure on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1992, aged 46.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my father's medical records.
4. My sister, Tracey Kennedy, has also provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry (Witness Number WITN5656001)

## **Section 2. How Affected**

5. My father (Dad) had severe Haemophilia A, as did his younger brother, Michael. They were treated at the Haemophilia Centre at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle under the care of Dr Peter Jones.
6. Dad was given Factor VIII (FVIII) concentrate at hospital and as a home treatment.
7. I do not know when Dad was co-infected with the viruses. He didn't want to talk about it. It was something he kept to himself.

## **Section 3. Other Infections**

8. I think that my father was also been infected with the Hepatitis B Virus.

## **Section 4. Consent**

9. I do not think my father was pre-warned of the risk of infection through contaminated blood products. Dad trusted his doctors and the hospital was like a second home to us. Tracey and I spent most of our childhood with Dad on the ward or at the Haemophilia Centre. We would skip up the ramp on the way in and the hospital staff gave us lollipops. They knew us, our Mum and our Dad and Uncle (known as Billy and Mick) so well. There was so much trust there.
10. Mum had a stroke and struggled with her mobility. She relied on my Dad's care. I was 11 years old when Mum died suddenly from a second stroke (a couple of years after the first stroke). There was no way Dad would have consented to any treatment and tests or allowed himself to be used as a guinea pig had he known of any risk. His family meant everything to him, and we depended on him. After Mum died, he had two young girls to bring up. He fought so hard to get better and stay alive for us. Dad was an amazing man.

He was in and out of intensive care that many times he was like a cat with nine lives and he never gave up. He was also a very private person and very protective of us. He was very close to his younger brother, Mick, and he had two very good friends, Pauline and Bill, who became our

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## **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

11. Tracey and I were profoundly impacted. We never had sleepovers or friends over for tea because Dad was always so ill. We barely had a life and, in effect became Dad's carer. We always thought Dad was just 'poorly' with his liver. Tracey and I gave Dad his FVIII injections. We were never told not to. We were never given any professional advice about any risk to us. In today's age, Tracey and I would be identified as children carers and given help and support. We were just left alone to deal with it all.

12. We had no idea that he was infected with HIV (or hepatitis) until he started to have variceal bleeds. I began to realise Dad was infected with HIV when I overheard a conversation between two paramedics. Dad was always fatigued and went to bed early. Dad was in a lot of pain for much of the time. I would hear Dad in pain in the night. I must have been about 16 years old (as Tracey was married and had left home) and I heard Dad sound like he was choking one night. When I saw that he was vomiting blood I ran towards him and he pushed me away. When I called for an ambulance, one of the paramedics kept telling me to stay away. He said 'No Pet, I will deal with this' and then told his colleague to 'double glove' as 'Billy is HIV positive'. The call outs then became a recurring experience. The paramedics were on very good terms with Dad. They were lovely with him.

13. I did not fully understand at first what HIV meant except for the media coverage (in relation to which I had taken little notice). Once I knew Dad was infected it was horrific. It was a massive thing for Dad to be infected with. HIV/AIDS associated with 'druggies' and the gay community and unclean,

immoral people in general. When Dad realised Tracey and I knew he was infected with HIV he only spoke of it on just one occasion. It was never again mentioned (not even when Uncle Mick later died of AIDS in 1991). I did not adjust or modify my own behaviour (and/or wear gloves around Dad or anything like that). I did not want him to feel dirty or that my feelings for him and my opinion of him had changed. There was no way Tracey and I were ever going to tell our friends. It was what felt like our own dirty little secret. One of my very closest friends still doesn't know to this day.

14. My memory of that time has been suppressed by me as a coping mechanism and the memories I do have tend to roll into one. I do not recall for sure when it happened, but I remember an incident wherein our garage driveway was daubed with the word 'AIDS' across it. No-one outside the family knew Dad had HIV and very few people even knew that he was a haemophiliac. We never found out who did it. Dad was so upset. Dad was too ill to clean it up, so Tracey and I had to try. It only had to happen once for Dad to be made to feel disgusted about himself.

15. Dad was often nauseas and sick and he lost weight. He was jaundiced. He had a lot of problems with his liver and he had a lot of chronic back pain. When Dad was having reoccurring variceal bleeds (and had been in and out of intensive care), I would lie awake in the night worrying because I couldn't hear him in the next-door bedroom. I once phoned Pauline and told her I thought Dad was dead. She told me not to go in the room. When she and Bill came to check on him, he was simply asleep knocked out from the morphine.

16. Having to live with severe pain over many years was one of the hardest things Dad had to endure for himself. He tried various treatments that didn't work (although a driver containing morphine that he could carry around with him in a bum bag relieved his pain for a very short while). Dad put some of his feelings down on paper. After his death we came across something he had written down in January 1991 about the pain he had been in for years and how he had felt unable to cope. It made difficult and emotional reading.

17. Having haemophilia was hard enough for Dad without being co-infected with HIV and HCV. Our Mum's premature death deeply affected him as his family was always his utmost priority. He and our Uncle Mick spent a lot of their youth in and out of hospital. He and Dad were very close. They went through so much together. When Uncle Mick (also infected with HIV through infected blood products) died in 1991 from AIDS Dad was again left devastated, knowing that the same thing (or something similar) was going to happen to him. It was a torture, a life sentence for him.
18. Dad was in and out of hospital a lot and, nearer the end, he was there most of the time. Every time he went into hospital, we were warned not to expect him to come back out. We brought him home on Christmas Day but after a few hours he had to go back in. We tried to spend as much time as possible with him in hospital so that he was never alone, and even when he passed, we were there with him. My Dad fought to stay alive. He did not want to die, and I did not want to watch him die. He suffered so much, and I was heartbroken when he died but relieved that he was finally free from pain, the pain that was never his fault. I was even robbed of any time with Dad after he died because his body had already started to deteriorate. Tracey and I were deprived of the support we should have had at that time as we could only tell others that Dad was terminally ill with liver failure.
19. Tracey and I also had personal letters to open and read after Dad had gone. I was just 19 years old. Dad had written his letter to me when I was 17. To think of Dad writing that letter breaks me. It must have been horrific for Dad to write such letters to his children. I have only very recently told my own children what happened to their Grandad. They didn't understand why I hadn't told them sooner. The world has changed, and I am so proud of them. Back then we were made to feel ashamed. I showed my Dad's letter to the children and they couldn't finish it. I think it helped them to know and understand what had shaped me and made me the way I am.
20. Those affected and then left behind by a person who has suffered and lost their life in such an awful and unnecessary way are also given a life sentence.

I have had a life-time of depression and poor mental health and had counselling from the age of 40 for 6 years (it was supposed to have been for just 6 weeks). I saw things no child or adolescent should have. I helped dress my Dad and give him his medication and watch him endure pain and sorrow. No-one ever asked 'Are you OK?' From the age of 13 I began to self-harm, jamming my fingers in the door. I craved attention. I just wanted to get some attention and some sort of sympathy from my Dad. I realise now that it was a cry for help. I didn't want to be the adult all the time. I wanted Dad to be a Dad and for us to stop pretending we were a normal family like everyone else. I met my husband at around the same age (at 13). Dad and I lived in a local authority bungalow and I had to leave my home and fend for myself when Dad died. I was alone and vulnerable. I tried taking a job on a cruise ship for a short while but I had nothing and held on to my soon to be husband and his family for my support like a safety blanket. On one occasion I tried to take my own life as I didn't think I cope by myself.

21. I have a mistrust of medical professionals. I knew that I was a haemophilia carrier when I fell pregnant with my first born and found out that I was having a boy. I had to leave the army base where my husband and I were stationed in Germany and return to see Peter Jones at the Haemophilia Centre. I remember that it looked and smelled the just the same way and the nurses remembered me. I felt so much fear about my son being born with haemophilia and having to go through the same thing as Dad, despite reassurances that times have changed and everything leading to those horrible mistakes had been rectified. I have two sons and GRO-C
- GRO-C I had to live with the worry that my GRO-C
- GRO-C I want all of this to end for my family. I do not want for any of my future generations to suffer the way Tracey and I did. I know that my Dad would want us to fight to bring to justice those responsible for what happened. I do not know how they are able to sleep at night.

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

22. We were never offered any counselling or psychological support when Dad was sick. Therapy was something I had to do on my own terms when I was much older. To relive it all was one of the hardest things I have had to do, and I have told my therapist things I have never told anyone.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

23. I do not know what sort of help Dad had from the Trusts and Funds. Dad couldn't work for long periods of time. When he was able to work, he didn't earn and we had a modest lifestyle.

## **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

24. I do not seek anonymity and understand that my Statement will be published by the Inquiry.

## **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed..... GRO-C .....

Dated..... 15<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021.....