

Witness Name: Patrick Joseph Collins

Statement No.: WITN5975001

Exhibits: **WITN5975002**

Dated: 27 August 2021

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PATRICK JOSEPH COLLINS**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 20 August 2021.

I, Patrick Joseph Collins, will say as follows:

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is Patrick Joseph Collins. I was born on GRO-C 1962. I live in London and my home address is known to the Inquiry. I am originally from a town south of Dublin in Ireland. I came to London when I was seventeen years old. I'm from a large Irish family; I have four brothers and five sisters. I have always been hardworking: I spent most of my working life as a butcher, then the building trade, mostly laying pipe work, and many different jobs depending on what was on offer at the time.
2. I intend to speak about my hepatitis C ("HCV") infection which I believe I contracted following a blood transfusion in 1987 at Watford Hospital. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, the treatment I have received and the impact it has had on me.

3. I have requested my medical records from Watford Hospital to clarify whether I received a blood transfusion during my 1987 operation. Upon receiving my medical records, I may wish to supply a supplementary witness statement to the Inquiry. I was initially unsure whether I was transfused during my operation. However, since I have been in contact with the Inquiry Investigator, events during that period of time have become clearer to me and I am much more certain that a transfusion took place during my operation at Watford Hospital.
4. I wish to acknowledge that I have been able to provide approximate time frames of the following events and that I am unable to recall some significant detail. This is due to the lapse of time since these events took place and naturally my memory has faded. I have provided as much detail as I can remember and time frames should be accepted as 'near to' and not the precise dates.
5. I can confirm that I have chosen not to seek legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. I can confirm that do not wish to seek anonymity.
6. The Inquiry Investigator has explained to me the 'Right to Reply' procedure, and I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.
7. I would be interested in providing oral evidence at the hearings and I am happy to do anything that may help the Inquiry.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

8. It all began on New Year's Eve 1987. I was living with GRO-C in Watford at the time. I had been out with friends in the afternoon. I wanted to go out again in the evening but she didn't want to and so, I went out on my own. When I returned home, she was a bit agitated with me. I thought she had poked me in the back. I turned round and I could see that she had stabbed me in the back. As previously mentioned, being a butcher by trade, I would use sharp knives for cooking. I had a large sharp knife on the side in the kitchen and that is what

she had used. I immediately laid down on the floor, kept pressure on it and told her to call for an ambulance. I can recall thinking at that moment, that it must be serious as there was not much blood and so I must be bleeding internally.

9. I cannot remember anything else until I woke up in the hospital. I woke up and I can recall seeing a blood bag beside me. I was told that I had suffered from a very serious injury. The knife had gone straight through my liver and it was badly damaged. The nurse explained that they operated on me straight away in order to fix the hole in my liver. I left the hospital a few days later and I was back to work within a few days.
10. I cannot remember being given any advice but I was probably told to take it easy. I was never told that I had received a blood transfusion and I didn't ask about it. At the time, I was grateful for everything they had done for me.
11. Many years later, I attended the GP, I had not been to the GP for twenty years at this point. However, I had been suffering from knee pain for a long time; it was causing me to limp and I was taking painkillers continuously for it. The GP sent me for a knee scan and they told me "there is nothing wrong with you."
12. After going back and forth with various hospitals, my hip was eventually operated on and part was replaced with metal. Following the operation, I had many blood tests and MRI scans, however I was never told what they were for.
13. One day in around 2014, my GP from Green Hill Park Medical Centre, called me out of the blue and told me over the phone "you have hepatitis C". All I was told was to be careful, wear a condom and that was it. I supply to the Inquiry exhibit **WITN5975002**. This letter written by Dr Ameet Dhar, Hepatologist addressed to Dr Rasooly of Neasden Medical Centre, details my hepatitis C diagnosis.
14. Following the diagnosis, I would attend appointments at St Mary's Hospital. The doctors would not hazard a guess to where the hepatitis C came from. I asked

the consultant, "do you think I got it from butchering?". He made a sound but he would not discuss it at all.

15. It then crossed my mind that I could have caught it from the ground work, whereby I was laying pipes and working with sewage. However, I ruled that out because we were masked and gloved up.
16. Other hospital staff asked me whether I was an intravenous drug user and I would reply no. Everyone that knows me, knows that I'm not a junkie and have never even taken drugs.
17. Doctors never mentioned to me the link between blood transfusions and hepatitis C. However, I never raised the link with them. I could never figure out how I got it but I thought there must be a reason for it. I believe that it came from the hospital's blood transfusion during my serious operation following the stabbing in 1987.
18. Much later, I was told during an appointment that I had alcohol induced cirrhosis of the liver. At this point, I did not question it because I did not know that you could have non-alcoholic cirrhosis. I was told that I was drinking too much and that was it.

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

19. As far as I am aware, I did not contract any other infections from the blood transfusion. I do not know whether I have been tested for HIV or other viruses as I have never been told.

### **Section 4. Consent**

20. I did not consent to the blood transfusion at the time because I required immediate medical attention and was unconscious.

21. During my medical check-ups before and after my liver transplant, my bloods were regularly tested. However, I have never been told what these tests are for. The clinicians who take the bloods do not even speak to you. I recall a particular nurse that wanted to use my right arm and I told her that I preferred my left. She said to me, "we are doing this arm". She left a sore mark where she could not find a vein. I have felt that I am treated like a 'pin cushion' in these places.

## **Section 5. Impact**

22. Before the hepatitis C treatment, I never experienced any symptoms of hepatitis, that I know of. If I ever felt bad in the morning, I would put it down to drinking the night before. Over the years, I became dependent on drink and I would say that I was a functioning alcoholic for a long time. It built up and sometimes I would drink ten to fifteen pints a day.

23. A few months after my hepatitis C diagnosis in 2014, I was offered treatment at St Mary's Hospital. It was an American drugs trial and only a number of people were chosen for it. I was told that I was very fortunate and I was encouraged to take the drug. I did not ask about the side-effects and they didn't say anything about them to me. When someone says here is a drug that will make you better, you never question it.

24. The twelve-week programme began in July 2014 and consisted of the following drugs: Sofosbuvir, Daclatasvir and Ribavirin (see **WITN5975002**).

25. During the programme, I suppose I felt like a guinea pig. I was constantly reminded by hospital staff how much the medication cost and it made me feel so guilty. I had to inject myself and I would have my bloods taken every week.

26. I did not suffer from any side effects from the treatment. However, I was in an incredible amount of pain from my hip and so, perhaps it was one of those things that blinded me to other pain.

27. Following the diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver, I was then told that I required a liver transplant (see **WITN5975002**) for the cirrhosis and I was placed on the transplant list. I was still on the treatment for hepatitis C and I think the hepatitis was holding up the liver transplant. I was told that there was a board that decides who is given the transplant and they have to decide who is most needy.
28. I got to the end of the treatment programme and a nurse told me, "you don't have hepatitis C anymore and so, we can proceed with the transplant."
29. The hospital then carried out a scan and found something irregular. I was called back into the hospital and was told that I had cancer of the liver. Again, please see **Exhibit WITN5975002**, which was updated to hepatocellular carcinoma as the reason for the liver transplant following its discovery.
30. I was told that they could carry out an operation to radiate away the cancer. They did the operation and they thought it was successful, and so I just had to wait my turn for the liver transplant.
31. In relation to the liver transplant, I never told my family, apart from my older brother, that I was going to have it. I had a brother who had recently died and I did not want to worry my mum.
32. For the first transplant attempt, I had the pre-op and was ready for the procedure. But last minute, they had to stop, because the liver measurements were not right. A couple of months later, they rang me again and I went in. The operation started on Saturday night and I think it lasted over twenty hours. They told me it was successful. Although, during the procedure, I lost my gallbladder. They mentioned it in passing and never told me that it could have an adverse impact on my health, but it has.
33. The recovery probably took two weeks and I was back home. Whilst in hospital, I was sleeping a lot and on a lot of medication. I had to get isolated at one point because I started to hallucinate. People came in to visit me and I would get mixed up and think they had been in earlier. I was looking through the window

and people outside all looked like clowns. I was ringing people up and saying I could see clowns outside. That went on for four or five days and it was really frightening.

34. I was then allowed back home after two weeks and I returned a couple of times for follow-up appointments. The first time I saw a consultant after the transplant he said to me, "you were very lucky, one week more and we would not have given you a new liver." This was because there was so much cancer in my liver, which they had initially thought had gone.

35. In terms of the side effects of the liver transplant, there is a lot of pain, and since I lost my gallbladder, I have constant pain. I also experience pains in my shoulder. I often get a slight pressure pushing down under my shoulder blade where the liver is.

36. I still do not have the strength that I used to have and my physical ability has gone down completely. I acknowledge that this can also be put down to old age.

37. In terms of mental health, I suffer from anxiety and depression which I never had before the liver transplant. Mentally, it has affected me an awful lot. It is always in the back of my head and I cannot get rid of it. It is like having a horrible accident and you cannot unsee it. Following on from the transplant, I used to feel guilty that someone had to die to give me my life.

38. I was seeing a psychologist for a while for my depression and anxiety, but they stopped seeing me due to covid-19. Then they would ring me for my appointments but it abruptly stopped without informing me. I am also on medication for my depression which I take daily.

39. I no longer trust medication since being infected with hepatitis C. I read into things too much and although the infection is cleared, it is always in the back of my mind.

40. Since I was told about the hepatitis C, my life totally changed in my relationships and women. It just does not work anymore and I am still so worried about infecting anyone.
41. I no longer socialise. After I stopped drinking, following medical advice - I stopped socialising. There is too much temptation. It took me a long time to get off the drink and you have to be careful. Therefore, I avoid social situations because I am unable to drink.
42. I do not tell a lot of people about my hepatitis C and I don't think a lot of people even know that I had a liver transplant. I feel embarrassed and ashamed about the hepatitis really because there is a stigma attached.
43. I have been in situations where my friend's children have had babies and I'm still worried about this awful infection, that I won't pick them up when I see them. I don't want to give to anybody this infection, even though I am told that I'm clear of it.
44. I feel obliged to tell the people that need to know. If I cut myself, I will not let anyone help me and I deal with it myself. I have not had to go to Accident and Emergency, but if I did then I would tell the nurses caring for me immediately. I cannot just brush it off; it is an everyday thing in my life and there is no way that I can get over it.
45. One day, I would like to go back to butchering but I would have to tell them about the hepatitis C. I would feel guilty if I didn't because injuries happen at work and I could bleed. Even though the doctor has told me that I am cleared, I'm constantly reminded of the hepatitis C in the letters that I receive from St Mary's Hospital every three months. Therefore, I feel obliged to tell people. I still feel responsible.
46. I do not spend a lot of money and I live off £200 a fortnight. Naturally, once you stop working and I stopped working due to the hepatitis C, it does have an impact on finances, but I can survive on what I have.



47. I have not told my family about the hepatitis C, cirrhosis or the liver transplant.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

48. I was never offered any psychological support following my hepatitis C diagnosis.

49. My liver appointments are more or less every month and I'm sent letters every three months containing the results. I believe I was given enough support following my liver transplant. At one point, I was seeing a nurse at the hospital and she would support me with my queries in relation to the transplant. She knew a lot about depression and she was great. Although, shortly before the pandemic she retired and so, I don't know if I will have that support again. Since the pandemic, my liver related appointments have been only over the phone.

50. Around eighteen months ago, during a dental appointment, I told the dentist that I recently had hepatitis C but that I had been cured. He stepped back from me. I don't think he believed that I could have been cured. I felt like he expected only a junkie to have it. I had used him before that but after I told him, I don't think he spent as much time on my appointments as he used to. However, I've gone to see him since and he is okay with me now. Maybe he had a look into my hepatitis treatment. The dentist really brought it to the forefront for me as I wasn't as bothered about the stigma before that.

51. I don't believe that I have been treated differently during medical appointments since my hepatitis infection. The one incident was with the dentist.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

52. I have not received financial assistance for my hepatitis C and it has never been mentioned to me. However, following my conversation with the Inquiry Investigator, I intend to make an application to EIBSS.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

53. In my heart, I believe that hepatitis C is the reason behind my liver transplant, cirrhosis of the liver and possibly the cancer. When I was diagnosed with cirrhosis, I was told that it was alcohol induced cirrhosis of the liver and so, I did not know you could get 'non-alcoholic cirrhosis'. Clinicians would always say that I drank too much and so that is what I initially put it down to.
54. From this Inquiry, I would like for people to be made more aware of what has happened with blood transfusions and I believe that we should have been told at the time that there was the possibility of a risk. Although, I cannot fault the hospital for any of my treatment as they did the best, they could for me.
55. Over the years, I have donated blood and I thought at the time that I was perfectly healthy and that does worry me. I hope that it was tested at the time.
56. My liver transplant doctors have never spoken of my hepatitis C diagnosis. I feel that they do not want to talk about it because they know that it was the hospital's fault that I contracted it.
57. I find it very peculiar that I have asked a couple doctors what blood type I am and they find it difficult or refuse to tell me. They say, "you won't know unless there is a reason to know." I think that the transfusion must have something to do with that response.
58. I would like to note that during the liver transplant, I spent over £300 on parking costs at the hospital, which is not reasonable. Following the liver transplant, I was also given a disabled badge for a small period of time. However, it was eventually taken back off me and I was told that I had recovered and so I no longer needed it.

**Table of Exhibits:**

Date	Description	Exhibit
21 July 2021	Letter from Dr Rasooly, Neasden Medical Centre from Dr Ameet Dhar, Hepatologist, with reference: CC515159.  Details Patrick Collins' problem list, nature of procedures and medication. Including Hepatitis C diagnosis and liver transplant.	<b>WITN5975002</b>

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 27-8-2020