Witness Name: Christine Freeman
Statement No.: WITN0800001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 5 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE FREEMAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 25 January 2018.

I, Christine Freeman, say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Christine Freeman. I was born on GRO-C 1944. I reside at GRO-C in New South Wales, Australia.

2. I live with my husband Graham Freeman and son Paul Freeman. My husband was infected with Hepatitis C by National Health Services blood products when we lived in England. We lived in England between 1941 and 1967 and between 1973 and 1975.

Section 2. How Affected

3. I first became aware my husband was a haemophiliac when he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in around 1962. Someone mentioned the condition when my husband was at the hospital. I didn't know what the condition involved, and nobody explained it to me at that time.

4. During the 1960s and 1970s, my husband had a number of health issues that required treatments involving blood transfusions, cryoprecipitate and plasma. We were living in Birmingham at the time and my husband was treated at Selly Oak Hospital, the Neurology Hospital in Birmingham City and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

5. When the treatments were being administered, nobody explained the risks of the treatments to us. They put the bag up, put the needle into my husband and that was it.

6. At some point during the mid-to-late 1960s, my husband was diagnosed with Non-A, Non-B Hepatitis. I was not provided with any advice at this stage. Nobody spoke to me about my husband's condition. I was not told that it was infectious. Nobody suggested that I should be tested for the virus. We were not provided with any information or paperwork.

7. In 1991, my husband was diagnosed with Hepatitis C. We went to see Professor Farrell at Westmead Hospital who explained the virus to us. We asked him some questions about diagnosis and treatment. It was only at this point that I became aware that Hepatitis C was infectious.

8. In around November 1992, after my husband's diagnosis, Professor Farrell placed my husband on a research trial involving the drug Interferon. After the initial trial was unsuccessful, my husband was placed on a combination of Interferon and Ribavirin.

9. As part of the trials, Graham required daily injections of medication. The daily trips to Westmead Hospital (which was and is approximately 30 minutes from our home) to receive the injections became too much. We were also spending significant amounts of money on petrol and parking when we went to and from the hospital. Eventually, my husband and I decided that I would administer the mediation. I was taught how to inject the medication by hospital staff who gave me good instructions.

10. At first, I administered my husband's medication by injecting it into his stomach. Later, his stomach became inflamed from the injections and I

had to inject the medication into his back, on either side of his spine into the muscle. I also watched what my husband ate. For example, I tried to make sure that he wasn't eating too many greasy foods.

11. Prior to my husband's Hepatitis C diagnosis, I worked as a department manager at the large Australian retailer K-Mart.

12. During the Interferon and Ribavirin trial, I gave up work in order to be at home with by husband. After the trial finished, I tried to go back to work for a few days each week but eventually I gave up. I wasn't given any support in taking care of Graham during this period.

Section 5. Impact

13. After my husband was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I felt isolated and stigmatised. I felt as though people wanted to stay away from us and that we were social outcasts.

14. Shortly after my husband's diagnosis we were told not to come to a wedding that we had been invited to because Graham had Hepatitis C. When people came to visit and I offered them a cup of tea, they would look at the cup to make sure it was clean. As a result of the stigma, we changed our lifestyle. We went out less. We would have occasional visitors or would occasionally visit people but didn't go out and socialise.

15. We also had to change our habits at home. Each of us had to have our own towels. I was told I had to be careful with cleaning the toilets. We had to use protection after decades of marriage. Ultimately, we had to learn how to deal with Hepatitis C and get on with living our lives.

16. I also observed the impact of Hepatitis C on my husband and our family. He wasn't able to give his children kisses. When his first grandson was born, he wasn't able to give him a cuddle and kiss on the cheek when we went to see him for the first time in hospital.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

17. My husband's infection also took a significant toll on our family financially. We went from having two full time wages to receiving around AU$11,000 from Centrelink (the Australian Government's social security agency). Both of us then went on the aged pension.

18. We had to support our family and keep making mortgage payments but struggled financially after my husband was terminated from his job on medical grounds and I had to give up my work to take care of him.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 5 February 2019