Witness Name: Mark Denner
Statement No.: WITN0371001
Exhibits: WITN0371002 - 0371006
Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARK DENNER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 4 April 2019.

I, Mark Denner, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Mark Denner. My date of birth is GRO-C 1955 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a chemical engineer by training. I intend to speak about my experience of Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me and the people in my life, the treatment I received and the impact it had on me.

Section 2. How Infected

2. I believe I was infected with Hepatitis C through a blood transfusion in 1977 at Caerphilly Miner's Hospital. I received the blood transfusion immediately after a serious motorbike accident that I had on 21 July 1977. I sustained multiple fractures of my pelvis, leg and knee and lost a lot of blood.

3. After the transfusion, I was jaundiced for a week. When my father asked why I was yellow, they told him "it was a result of the shock". My father, as a result of being a mining engineer, was well versed in first aid, didn't believe that the yellow colour could be caused by shock.

4. It was not until 2000 that I found out that I was infected with Hepatitis C. I was working in Italy for an oil company. About three months after I started working, I did a routine general health medical examination.

5. In September 2000, the Italian GP that was working for the oil company called me to see him. He told me in a very matter of fact way that I had Hepatitis C. He couldn't tell me how I got it. He also didn't tell me what to do about it or make any recommendations on how to manage it.

6. I remember that he told me that Hepatitis C is a slow disease that takes a long time to show itself. He said that I had about two to three years to live.

7. I had no idea what Hepatitis C was. All information I got was from my own research on the internet. Because the Italian GP who diagnosed me had no idea of how to treat Hepatitis, I tried to find treatment information online.

8. There was a lot of discussion at the time about Hepatitis C being caused by alcohol and smoking. I was very surprised because I never drank or smoked very much. Nevertheless, I stopped drinking and smoking entirely for the year while I was in Italy.

9. It was only in 2008 that I found out that blood transfusions could be the source of Hepatitis C, and that was when the penny dropped that I must have contracted the infection in 1977.

10. Thankfully, I was cleared of Hepatitis C in 2010 after my Interferon treatment.

11. Given my medical history, it is possible that I should have been told about the infection before I did. Sometimes I wonder if I ever would have found out about the Hepatitis infection if I had relied on the NHS to pick it up.

12. In 1985, fifteen years before my diagnosis, I had a routine medical examination at the General Hospital in Birmingham and liver problems were detected. I was told that I had elevated SGOT liver enzyme levels (Serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase, now referred to as AST) – these were quadruple what they should be. The doctor, Dr Elias, was at a loss to explain this.

13. Dr Elias recommended that I go for a liver biopsy, which I did in 1985. There was no mention of my being infected with Hepatitis of any kind.

14. In 1990, I had a second biopsy in the Midlands. Again, I was not diagnosed with Hepatitis of any kind.

Section 3. Other Infections

15. I do not believe that I have received any infection or infections other than Hepatitis C through infected blood or blood products. I recall being tested for Hepatitis B and being clear.

Section 4. Consent

16. I do not believe that I have been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent, or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

17. Being infected with Hepatitis C has affected my life dramatically. The physical effects began in the 1980s. I noticed that I was very short of breath. I was embarrassed when I spoke to my colleagues in the office because my voice sounded like I was always exhausted. I began to notice that I needed to stop to catch my breath very often despite the fact that I have always been very fit and done a lot of exercise. I have had consistent shortness of breath for the last 42 years.

18. The shortness of breath has been accompanied by bouts of extreme fatigue and nausea. I particularly recall a period in the 1980s when for a week I felt physically shattered. I stayed home from work for a week rather than going on holiday.

19. I have also developed shakiness. I do not drink tea or coffee in front of strangers because I spill and I find it embarrassing.

20. Sometimes I am inclined to say that the mental effects of the infection have been worse than the physical.

21. After I was officially told that I was infected with Hepatitis C, I had a very bad year of depression. I felt a darkness come over me. The thought that I had two or three years to live propelled me into a year of anguish. It was hard to work the long hours that I was working when my view of my life had shifted. I hadn't done the travelling that I wanted to do and I was wondering why I was there.

22. From a professional point of view, my infection drastically limited my job prospects. Immediately after my diagnosis (while I was working in Italy), my work load reduced a lot. I think that this was because they wanted me to leave but could not by law fire me on the basis that I had Hepatitis. This made me feel very much on edge.

23. I decided to leave the job in Italy in order to come back to the UK to sort out my medical treatment. I came back to the UK in June 2001 and went almost immediately to my GP. I told my doctor about the test. It was only then that I got my first acknowledgement by anyone in the NHS that I had Hepatitis C.

24. Still, I was told that nothing could be done and was not offered any treatment. I told the doctors that I had constant back pain, in the side of my back and again they could not explain it.

25. I went back to Dr Elias and had another (third) liver biopsy. After that, he told me that the results were the same as those from my previous biopsies.

26. At that point, I was very fed up with the doctors and with the whole system. I decided to travel for a while. Travelling seemed to be the best option because I thought I wouldn't get another job because of my infection with Hepatitis C. I knew I would always fail the routine medical.

27. After travelling, I decided to seek work in the Middle East. This was another decision necessitated by my infection. I worked in a small industry and knew that news of my infection would have travelled from Italy to the UK and likely though Europe. It was therefore unlikely that I would be hired. The Middle East was a safer option, and I was under the impression that routine medicals were not required for employees there.

28. After working for about six weeks on a contract in Qatar, the management team started talking about doing HIV tests on all employees. I decided that I had to leave.

29. I then went to GRO-C to look for work. I didn't end up working there but I met my wife in 2001 while I was there. She came with me to Abu Dhabi and then to Azerbaijan where I worked for a year until 2003.

30. My next job was in Thailand in 2006. Because I needed to go offshore onto the oil rigs, I was required to do a routine medical. I had my blood taken. At first, the company manager passed me. But then I got a call from the senior manager informing me that I could not go offshore because of a liver problem that they had detected. That was the end of that job.

31. I have not worked since then. I have looked for work but have not been able to secure any jobs. I got job offers in Kazakhstan, Algeria and Japan. Unfortunately, these offers were rescinded when I submitted full disclosure of my medical issues.

32. While I was in Thailand, I heard about the experimental Interferon trials that were being conducted in the UK. This was the first I had heard of any treatment of Hepatitis C. At the time, I decided to come back to the UK so that I could participate in the trial.

33. In June 2007, I went to Dr Gray to ask if I could get onto the Interferon trial. I had to really push for the treatment. It was two years from when I requested this treatment to when I started, which was in June 2009. I was frustrated that there was such a long gap.

34. I was on weekly Interferon injections until January 2010. The treatment was very tough physically and mentally. I would have the injections on a Friday afternoon and then feel completely wiped for the weekend. My body would be sore and I would experience flu-like symptoms.

35. The treatment was more difficult from a mental point of view because of the fact that I went through most of it without my wife, she had to GRO-C. For the first six weeks of my treatment, she was here. She told me that I would sometimes scream during the night or be very agitated. My wife would have to settle me down. In the morning, I wouldn't remember any of it.

36. When I told the nurses about this, I was told I may have post-traumatic stress disorder. They said that there was nothing I could do to treat it. I was not referred to anyone for help or counselling.

37. The next four months of treatment I did by myself. My wife was not GRO-C over that period which in turn made it very stressful for her. I later found out that she was GRO-C GRO-C She told me that she was terrified that I would die and that she would not be able to bury me.

38. GRO-C

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42. **GRO-C**

43. It is ironic that I am now reliant on benefits. When I was effectively forced to stop working at 51, I was earning more than Tony Blair! I had at least ten years of work ahead of me. I have now spent a lot of my savings. I am more fortunate than others who did not have any savings.

44. I still struggle from a mental health point of view. Many social situations that are unremarkable for other people are very difficult for me to deal with. I know, for example, that I have avoidance coping issues.

45. I have tried to help myself through attending CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) workshops but the two that I went to were ineffective. They were merely about what CBT could do.

46. I have also asked to go on an anger management course because at some points I have felt so enraged by the medical and legal system. I was told on the course that I was doing all the right things and I should "just keep doing them". This is not very helpful. It makes me feel very lost.

47. Another aspect of the mental effects of my infection is the stigma. I did not tell anyone other than my wife and my GP that I had Hepatitis C until 2009 because I was nervous about the stigma that would attach to me.

48. When I began having Interferon treatment, I told my brother and sister. I felt that they kept **me** at arm's length from that point. My brother's visits with my nephews (his children) dropped off.

49. I still do not consciously tell people that I had Hepatitis C.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

50. I was not aware of any treatment for Hepatitis C until 2006 when I heard about the Interferon trials as I mentioned above. I did all of my own research into Hepatitis C.

51. The first time that I received specialist advice about Hepatitis C was in 2009 when I saw a specialist nurse. She told me that the Interferon treatment that I was receiving would be dangerous for my wife if she became pregnant. I do not recall her telling me much more than that. I was disappointed with this.

52. I was offered antidepressants when I was having my Interferon treatment. Initially, I refused it but after about four months, I decided to try them. I received the tablets. Before I started taking them, I read the leaflet which said that they should not be taken in conjunction with one of the medicines I was taking. Luckily I read the insert. The GP confirmed that I shouldn't take it, so I didn't end up ever taking antidepressants.

53. I have never been offered counselling or psychological support.

54. I have never been contacted about or heard of a lookback exercise.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

55. I have received financial assistance from the Skipton Fund. I applied to the Fund in November 2008 after Dr Ch'Ng at Singleton Hospital, Swansea recommended that I do.

56. There were a number of hiccups in this application. I was told that I needed to provide the Fund with proof that I had had the blood transfusion. It was difficult for me to obtain these records as I was told by Gwent Hospital that my records had been destroyed under the Data Protection Act.

57. The Director of the Skipton Fund, Nicholas Fish, wrote me a letter saying that my proof of the blood transfusion (three letters from independent medical professionals) was insufficient. I responded with a strongly worded letter explaining why it was impossible for me to get my records. These letters have been shown to the investigators and are exhibits to this statement.

58. Eventually, I received a £20 000 ex gratia payment in June 2009, six or seven months after my original application.

59. From 2016, I received an annual payment from the Skipton Fund. I elected to receive it in quarterly instalments. In 2006, I received £3500 per annum. In 2018, it was increased to £4500. I still receive an annual payment, though it is now through the WIBSS.

60. The annual payment was increased last month to £18,833. I am also being paid £14,000 for last year. This is a big boost and makes a significant difference to me.

61. I have not applied for or received assistance from any other funds.

62. I receive a monthly PIP disability benefit. I used to receive £3,500 per annum but this amount has been reduced to £2,500. This was another fight because I had an assessment in Swansea after which my PIP was knocked to zero. I appealed and won but my payment was still reduced to £2,500.

Section 8. Other Issues

63. In 2007 and 2008, I approached nine legal firms. I thought that I may have a case for compensation for Hepatitis C after the road traffic accident. Eventually, Michelmores Solicitors took on the case. I think that they were trying to collect people in order to run a class action. I did not pay them for their services.

64. After about three years, I received a letter explaining that my chances were not good as my claim was out of time. After that I abandoned the idea of legal action. I know too many people who have spent all of their savings on legal action and have not got anything out of it.

65. I feel that there has been a lot of cover-up during this long period. I don't believe people like David Owen and Ken Clarke when they say, for example, that David Owen asked for his ministerial documents and was told that were scrapped without his consent. Surely when you occupy a high position, you can do more about people who say they can't find documents that you believe to exist.

66. I also feel uneasy about the destruction of patients' records when they are still alive. I feel like the Data Protection Act is something that is being hidden behind and used as an excuse. That doesn't wash with me.

67. I don't want to come across as ungrateful to the medical profession or to my doctors. I am grateful to many of them who assisted me and I realise that they work under difficult conditions. I do feel, however, that I have never really been provided with sufficient information or explanations from the medical profession.

68. I have often felt that I need to fight to get a straight answer and this is heartless to patients in my view. My general feeling is that communication is very poor and very vague. I don't trust the medical system.

69. I have shown to the investigators key documents from my records. They are annexed to this statement as exhibits marked WITN0371002 - 0371006, and their content is summarised below:

Exhibit Number	Ref. or identifying feature	Contents
WITN0371002	Letter from Dr Elias to Dr Murphy 6.9.1985	Dr Elias notes abnormal liver function and a concern to exclude 'viral hepatitis presumably related to the transfusion he had at the time of his motor cycle accident'
WITN0371003	Letter from Dr Elias to Stefano Formiatti (Agip) 18.10.2000	Dr Elias notes that raised SGOT levels are similar to past liver biopsy results and no evidence exists of past liver disease
WITN0371004	Email from Nick Fish 27.03.2009 re Skipton Fund Application	Nick Fish's email re insufficiency of proof of blood transfusion
WITN0371005	Letter from Mark Denner to Skipton Fund 21.04.2009	Mark Denner's response to Nick Fish's request for further proof of transfusion explaining lack of conclusivity
WITN0371006	Letter from Mark Denner	Questions legality of Gwent Hospital's destruction of records of a living patient

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 24th April 2019