Witness Name: Matthew Stephen Harris
Statement No: WITN1276001
Exhibits: 0
Dated: January 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN WITNESS STATEMENT OF MATTHEW STEPHEN HARRIS

I, Matthew Stephen Harris will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Matthew Stephen Harris. My date of birth is GRO-C 1972. I am 46 years old. I live at GRO-C. I am married with four children. I have two sons from my first marriage and two daughters from my second marriage. My sons are aged 23 and 16 and my daughters are 11 and 5. Since leaving school I have worked as a painter and decorator and for the past 12 years I have been a sole trader.

2. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my medical records.

Section 2. How Infected

3. As my family have a history of Haemophilia I was tested at birth and diagnosed with severe Haemophilia A. I have always needed treatment from blood products

and my earliest recollection of the blood products I received was 8Y but there were probably other products.

4. I receive treatment from the Haemophilia and Thrombosis Centre at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford. My consultants at the time were Dr Matthews and Dr Riza.

5. I have received Factor VIII treatment since birth and currently have an injection of prophylaxis every other day.

6. I understand from my parents that they did not receive any information or advice about the risk of being exposed to infection from blood products. I have never received any information either.

7. As a result of receiving blood products I was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV).

8. I cannot remember when I was diagnosed or actually being told of any diagnosis but I remember being with a consultant and one of the nurses when they were discussing when they thought the time was right to put me on medication for HCV. I understand the medication at the time was not adequate for treating it. Therefore the implication was that I had to wait until something more substantial was available that would eradicate my HCV.

9. At the time, I did not take any notice of the conversation and I didn't realise the implications of the diagnosis. I thought it was a side effect or part of the Haemophilia. I did not realise that it was something completely different.

10. As far as I am aware I was not given any information or advice about the infection at that time and I certainly did not appreciate how serous my condition was at the time.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. I have not received any other infections as a result of receiving infected blood products.

Section 4. Consent

12. I cannot say whether I was tested without my knowledge and consent. However, my blood was routinely tested and I assumed the test related to my Haemophilia. Prior to knowing about my infection I did not know I was being tested for HCV. I was not given any information about the tests. I am not aware that my blood has been tested for the purpose of research.

Section 5. Impact

13. I have received two courses of treatment for my HCV. The first treatment was a 3 month course in November 2014 from Kettering Hospital. I was treated there rather than at the Churchill Hospital as it was closer to me. I had to take 11 tablets a day and a peg injection on a Friday evening. I took the tablets with a pint of full fat milk to ease ingestion.

14. The injection I had on a Friday knocked me out for the whole weekend and I could not get out of bed at all. I had to go to work on a Monday morning, feeling very poorly, I felt sick and suffered from headaches. I had flu type symptoms and felt generally awful.

15. I continued to work because I am self-employed. Working on my own was made it even tougher. I would often crumble to the floor and get really upset because it was very difficult to cope.

16. There were times at the dinner table with my children when I burst into tears for no apparent reason. It was a bad time for them as well. My youngest daughter was 18 months old at the time. It was a strain on my whole family.

17. After 12 weeks the medication was stopped as it was not working. I then had to wait for another drug to be developed which contained the appropriate ingredient that would treat my infection. There was then a further wait until the hospital could afford to prescribe it to me. I understand that Leicester and Kettering Hospitals could only give this course of medication to eight patients per month. I had to wait for my turn to receive the medication. I was led to believe that the treatment cost £60 000.

18. The second course of treatment I received was in 2016. The treatment was again for 12 weeks and consisted of only tablets. I cannot remember exactly how many tablets I was taking per day but there were certainly more than two. One of the side effects of the medication was brain fog, I struggled to recollect things. The tablets were not as potent as the first ones but I still felt sick, had muggy headaches and felt lethargic. The treatment I received was successful and my liver is in good condition.

19. I am very angry and I feel resentment towards the Haemophilia Centre in Oxford, as well as the doctors who treated met. I have cousins who have died from similar infections and GRO-C GRO-C. I try to help him as much as I can.

20. The side effect that remains is short term memory loss. I also feel mentally tired. Further I suffer from really bad mouth and throat ulcers. I think they were caused by the HCV infection and treatment. I was prescribed tablets from the doctors that cleared the ulcers but they keep returning.

21. Prior to the successful treatment I was unable to obtain life insurance. I have thankfully managed to get it now as my nurse said that because I am clear of HCV life insurance should be available to me even though my HCV could return.

22. As referred to above I did have difficulty accessing the treatment due to the funding issues in the NHS. If funding had been available I would have received the treatment earlier.

23. It has been difficult for us financially. My wife worked for the NHS and the stress of working together with caring for me during my second course of treatment as well as caring for the children caused her to have to give up work. Fortunately my father-in-law has helped us financially.

24. I have also had two ankle operations to fuse them due to my Haemophilia. I had three months off work for each operation. I had saved enough money to get through that period but I still had to go back to work earlier than I should have done. This also depleted our savings.

25. I have never had any problems obtaining treatment for other conditions due to my HCV.

26. My condition has affected me mentally and has been a massive strain on my family.

27. However, I am not embarrassed or ashamed of what has happened to me and I speak openly about it to my family and friends. I have also spoken on TV, 'Look East' and 'The Anglian News' as well as and radio news, BBC Northampton to discuss the issues around the Contaminated Blood Inquiry. I have become friends with the radio DJ who rings me to ask me to comment on the issues if the Inquiry has been on the news.

28. I cannot say whether my condition affected my education as I did not know I had it at the time. I do not know what the effects may have been.

29. My condition has definitely affected my ability to work. In particular as referred to above I had to have time off while I was being treated. This impacted on my financial circumstances as I was paying maintenance to my first wife and had to support my current wife and children, as well as pay bills and mortgage. I rang the Haemophilia Society at the time but they said there was nothing they could do.

30. My condition also impacted on those close to me. My wife GRO-C GRO-C She has been at my side during the time I was on medication and suffering from side effects. She had time off work to take care of me. Seeing me in that condition made her ill as well. The doctor said the best thing for her was to leave her job. She was signed off work for a month due to stress, then handed in her notice to continue supporting us. The children have had to see me upset, being ill in the bathroom and lying ill on the sofa. They regularly asked 'Why is daddy always in bed being poorly?'

31. I worked through both courses of treatment but sometimes had to go home early because I felt so sick. During the first course, my daughter had a Christmas bring and buy sale at school. I really wanted to go but when I got there, I felt extremely ill. I was struggling to keep my eyes open as the treatment I was receiving was strong and toxic similar to chemotherapy.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

32. The only difficulty I had obtaining treatment was getting the second course of medication. I had to wait for suitable medication to become available that my body would accept.

33. I have not had counselling or psychological support for my condition. I may have been given a leaflet by the hospital saying that the treatment I was receiving would make me feel ill and angry and that those were the side effects of the drug. There was also a telephone number I could call if I had suicidal thoughts but there was no other form of counselling offered to me.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. I found out that financial assistance was available when I stumbled upon Bruce Norwell on Facebook. He brought the schemes to my attention. I received the ex-gratia payment of £20,000 in the late 1990's, I was then in the system and received communications about my entitlement to funding.

35. The Caxton Foundation was formed to provide financial assistance and I received a monthly allowance of £200. Then a new scheme was introduced and I became entitled to Stage 2 payments. For the last 12 months, I have been receiving £1,500 per month.

36. When the system changed to the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) the application process was more protracted, it was not straight forward. I had to prove things they already knew and how I was entitled to the payments. There was a lot of form filling and I had to pay for a report from my doctor explaining my condition. I had to chase the Haemophilia Centre to write a letter about my condition as my request may have been pushed to the bottom of the pile. I found the application process stressful.

37. I am grateful for the financial assistance I received from the Caxton Foundation. I applied for and received a new mattress, a washing machine and tyres for my car.

38. I am also grateful to the EIBSS for the monthly payments but I do not think it is enough.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. The Inquiry should be dealt with as quickly as possible. It is stressful for all involved, particularly those who will not live to see the end. We need some recompense and a proper apology rather than what David Cameron said in the House of Commons. I do not understand why the Government cannot hold their hands up and just admit their fault.

40. Once they knew what had happened, the Government should not have made it difficult for people to receive compensation. People are losing their jobs as companies cannot afford to keep paying them whilst they are on sick leave. As a result, people are getting evicted from their homes because they cannot afford to pay bills or mortgages.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

41. I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

42. I wish to be called to give oral evidence if I can assist the Inquiry.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed……GRO-C……

Matthew Stephen Harris

Dated January ~~2018~~

9,1,2019