

Witness Name: Colin Victor Spring

Statement No.: WITN0774001

Exhibits: NIL

Dated: 02/04/19

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### WRITTEN STATEMENT OF COLIN VICTOR SPRING

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 8<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

I, Colin Victor Spring, will say as follows: -

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Colin Victor Spring. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958. My address is known to the Inquiry. I am retired and am currently living in France with my wife Kathleen. We have one son, Colin who lives in the United States of America.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus ("HCV"), which I contracted as a result of being given a contaminated blood transfusion as a child. In particular, I intend to discuss how I was infected with my illness and the diagnosis of my illness.

## Section 2. How Infected

3. I believe I was infected with the HCV in 1972 at Aldershot Military Hospital, where I was given a blood transfusion following an operation.
4. In either March or April 1972, when I was 14 years old, I walked out into the road and was hit by a car. Immediately after the accident, I was unconscious and taken by ambulance to Aldershot Military Hospital. As a consequence, I required surgery to repair my broken femur.
5. I know that it was either March or April 1972 because it was not long after the IRA bombing in the town in February of that year. I can remember the heightened security surrounding the entrance to the hospital because of the bombing.
6. After four or five days in Aldershot Military Hospital, I was taken for an operation. The procedure involved inserting a long metal nail inside the bone, ensuring that it is correctly lined up. I remember being told that there were only four surgeons in the country who could perform this operation and that the reason that I had been taken to Aldershot Military Hospital was because one of these four surgeons was based there.
7. I was in the operating theatre for eight hours and to this day have a ten-inch scar up my thigh from this operation. I woke up and had a blood drip going into my body, which was later changed for a second one. In total, I was given two pints of blood by transfusion. This was the only occasion in my life when I have received a blood transfusion. I have since had other operations but have never required further blood transfusions. It was through this contaminated blood transfusion in 1972 that I believe I was infected with the HCV which was not diagnosed until 43 years later.
8. After the operation and transfusion, I remained in Aldershot Military Hospital for a further eight weeks after the surgery where I underwent

physiotherapy and had my stiches taken out. At the time, I considered the treatment that I received at Aldershot Military Hospital to be very good.

9. I do not have a copy of my medical records or records of the operation from that time. I did not expect that I would ever need them. To the best of my knowledge, neither my parents nor I were given any information regarding the potential risk of HCV infection as a result of receiving a blood transfusion.
10. I only learnt of my HCV infection once I had relocated to Brittany, France. I suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disorder which I have had since 1992. Whilst living in England this meant that I was classified as 'disabled', spent most of my time at home, required a walking stick and struggled to brush my hair and teeth.
11. Whilst living in France I was prescribed Methotrexate to treat my rheumatoid arthritis. This is a chemotherapy agent and immune system suppressant to prevent my blood from fighting itself. I was on Methotrexate for many years, until it started to make me ill. Initially I would be ill for a couple of days and then later for three days at a time. The longer I was on the Methotrexate, the longer my periods of illness would last.
12. In early 2015 I went to see my rheumatologist in Guingamp, France as I kept getting ill. He suggested that I stop taking the Methotrexate and prescribed me a new drug, Enbrel. However, before I could begin taking this new medication, I was required to have a comprehensive blood test. When the results of the blood tests came back, my doctor called and asked that I come in to see him at his practice. To my great surprise, he explained that everything was fine except that I had tested positive for the HCV.
13. I just remember being absolutely gobsmacked and in a state of shock with the result of the blood tests. I wondered how I had contracted HCV. I was very worried because I didn't really know what HCV was but I knew that it

was a nasty thing. I didn't really know what it did to people. I remember thinking – what are the implications of this? What do I do? What if my wife or Colin has it too?

14. My doctor took me through all the possible ways in which I could have been infected with the HCV. As I have many tattoos, we discussed them as a possible cause. However, my wife and I design tattoos and we know everything there is to know about them, including the safe use of needles and the sterilisation processes. I have only ever used one tattooist for my tattoos, a man I know well and with whom I used to work. I know he discards his needles after one use and then his needle holders are sterilised. It was therefore easy to eliminate this as a possible cause of infection. Equally, neither myself nor my wife has ever used drugs.

15. My doctor asked me if I had ever received a blood transfusion. I told him I had once in 1972. He then told me that at around the date of my blood transfusion, there had been many contaminated blood products and many patients were infected as a result of contaminated blood transfusions. He concluded that I was most likely infected with the HCV through the blood transfusion that I had received in 1972.

16. My doctor told me that I would need to do another blood test so that my blood could be sent to Paris for tests. This was to establish whether the HCV was active, dead or dormant. He told me that I should not worry if the tests results came back positive as there was treatment that he could offer me. He told me that after a course of ten injections into my stomach I could be cured. While I was definitely not looking forward to the ten injections, his words did reassure me. I cannot recall the name of the course of treatment he suggested.

17. The results came back from the laboratory in Paris on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015 **NOT RELEVANT**. I could not believe my luck. My doctor told me that I am one of only 4% of people in the world whose blood has the antibodies with which to combat the HCV. As a result, the HCV was now dead.

18. We do not know when the antibodies killed the HCV. I don't think I have ever felt the effects typically experienced by someone suffering with the HCV so I assume that it was killed early on in the period between the infection in 1972 and my diagnosis in 2015. I am not sure if having the required antibodies is related to my blood type, I am part of the O RhD negative blood group, one of the rarest blood groups in the world.

19. I was obviously very pleased to have received the news that my body had killed off the HCV and consider myself to be extremely lucky to have survived being infected with a virus that can kill you.

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

20. I do not believe that as a result of being given infected blood products I have contracted any infection other than the HCV. I assume that while testing me for HCV or during other blood tests, I was at some point tested for HIV and the results were negative. After I received the letter telling me I had tested positive for HCV, I was told that the chances of me having passed it onto my wife or my child was very low.

21. To the best of my knowledge, my wife has never been tested for either HCV or HIV. My son GRO-C before he was allowed to immigrate to the United States and therefore I am sure GRO-C  
GRO-C

### **Section 4. Consent**

22. I have been asked if I believe that I have ever been treated or tested without my knowledge or consent and the answer is no, I have always consented to any treatment or tests that I have received.

23. I do believe that my parents should have been informed about the risks of possible HCV infection from contaminated blood products that existed at that time.

#### **Section 5. Impact**

24. The impact on myself was far less than it would have been for others in my position because I was so lucky. As my body killed the HCV naturally, I did not suffer any noticeable impact from having been infected. Having read about the impact of HCV on other people who have been infected, I am obviously very happy that I have not suffered the effects of it.

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

25. I am extremely happy with the healthcare I received when diagnosed with the HCV. I have been very impressed with the French doctors and consultants that I have come into contact with. They have been absolutely spot on. Early intervention is key to the healthcare philosophy in France. The attitude is that every citizen has the right to work in order to look after his or her family and thus it is important to restore you to health as quickly as possible so that you are able to continue working.

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

26. I have never applied for financial assistance. I was unaware that trusts and funds were available for infected people until I became aware of the Inquiry. I thought that because I have not suffered any significant impact from having been infected with the HCV that I would not qualify for financial assistance. I do not intend on applying for financial assistance.

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

27. I contacted the Inquiry because I wanted to tell my story to assist the Inquiry in its work. I believe that the more people the Inquiry knows were infected, the more accurate a picture the Inquiry can develop of what happened historically.

28. I would like to see recommendations that ensure that something like this never happens again. I would like to see recommendations on the screening of blood to prevent people from being given contaminated blood products.

29. I consider myself extremely lucky. As one of only 4% of people worldwide with the antibodies to combat and kill the HCV without treatment, I am very fortunate that the HCV is dead inside me and that as a result I did not pass it on or endanger my family.

#### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

GRO-C

Dated 02/04/19