Witness Name: Alistair Moore McGonigle
Statement No.: WIT3190001
Exhibits: None
Dated: January 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ALISTAIR MOORE MCGONIGLE

Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is Alistair Moore McGonigle and my address is GRO-C GRO-C and my date of birth is GRO-C 1958. I got married in 1982 and live with my wife. We will be celebrating our 39th anniversary next April. We have four sons, two living locally, one in Australia, one in Brazil.

Section 2: How infected

Haemophilia

2. I was diagnosed with haemophilia A (mild) when I was maybe 13 or 14 years old. A few years prior to being diagnosed, I had an operation to take my tonsils out and I almost bled to death but at this time, my condition was not discovered. The main problem I had was whenever I had a tooth extraction, the bleeding wouldn't stop and because of this, I was referred to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. I was the first haemophiliac discovered in my family. GRO-C GRO-C

3. Dr Mayne (the Head of Haematology) was the first person to tell me I was a haemophiliac and she treated me until 1998. Since 1998, I have attended the Broadwater Suite at Belfast City Hospital. I do recall the name of another clinician who has treated me, Dr Anderson. Dr Gary Benson is now in charge at the Broadwater Suite at Belfast City Hospital. I have been to the Broadwater Suite for blood tests and to be tested and vaccinated for Hepatitis B, but this contact has gradually dwindled over the years. They now contact me maybe once a year by telephone for an update.

4. Since being diagnosed with haemophilia, I have only ever received treatment with blood products in preparation for dental treatment.

5. I can recall that in around 1974, I was at school getting ready to do my O-level exams and I had a tooth extraction. After this, I was off school for maybe a month or two with jaundice. When this happened, the doctors did not know what had caused the jaundice. I then recall that I had another tooth extraction in around September/October 1980. In those days you went into hospital for a number of days which would not have been easy for my father. We did not have a car and lived 50 miles from the Royal Victoria in Belfast.

6. Although I cannot exactly recall the name of the treatment which I received, Cryoprecipitate and Factor VIII does ring a bell with me and I believe that I would have been treated with those products.

7. As far as I know, my parents were not informed about the potential risks of the blood products which I was being treated with. They were willing to try anything to treat me because every time I had a tooth extraction, I did not stop bleeding – it was horrific, I shared a bedroom with my brother and the blood would be everywhere, on the pillows, on the walls and all over me.

8. I cannot recall being told about the risk of treatment, either when I was younger or when I reached an age when I would be able to understand the risks.

Diagnosis with Hepatitis C

9. The next time I went to the Royal Victoria for a tooth extraction was on 27 November 1998 as a day patient. I could tell there was something wrong at the time but no-one was saying anything, it was really odd. My tooth was extracted but they asked me to come back the next day. I had to ask my brother to drive me back there and eventually I saw a lady (I cannot recall her name) who started questioning me about my lifestyle and basically asked me if I was gay. I told her that I was married with four boys. She then asked me if I was taking drugs and using needles to which I replied 'no'. After all of the questioning, she then informed me I had Hepatitis C. It was like a bomb going off, I went to get my tooth extracted and came out with a diagnosis of Hepatitis C.

10. I cannot properly recall what verbal information I was given about Hepatitis C or the risk of transmitting it at the time. I do recall being asked if I used my own toothbrush and that sort of comment sticks in your mind. I also recall being told that it could be transmitted by blood, an open wound for example. Also because I had sons (which was a blessing in disguise as there was no risk of haemophilia being passed to them as my wife does not carry the gene) I did not take the information on board because I thought my family was safe. Obviously once I had time to process everything, I thought about the scenario of passing my Hepatitis C infection to my wife and I was given literature to read about the risk of transmission but there was not any formal follow up.

11. As it had been some time since my last visit to the Royal Victoria in 1980, the hospital informed me that my notes recorded that I had moved to London. I informed them that I had not moved there but that my cousin (who was roughly the same age) had and they said that there had been some sort of mix up with the hospital notes. I find the timing of this strange as they were now bombarding me with my diagnosis of Hepatitis C.

Section 3: Other infections

12. I have not contracted any other infections due to contaminated blood products.

Section 4: Consent

13. Neither I nor my parents were aware that I was being tested for Hepatitis C. There was over a 20 year gap between the time I had a tooth extraction in 1974 and the time I was informed I had contracted Hepatitis C. They must have tested me either in 1974 or 1980 but I was never informed about this.

Section 5: Impact

Physical/mental impact on me

14. Being diagnosed with Hepatitis C hit me hard – more mentally than physically and it hit me more than my diagnosis of haemophilia did. Being diagnosed with haemophilia meant that when I was younger, I could not play football and the like and I bruised very easily but I do not feel that my haemophilia impacted my life too much until 1998 when I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C.

15. I did not really understand what Hepatitis C was. I was so shocked. I have never been the type of person to go to the doctors very often but when I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I could not go by myself. I was 40 years old and my mother had to take me.

16. I put a lot of weight on in a short period of time. I was also put on strong anti-depressants called Seroxat, which I stopped taking about three or four years ago. There were reports about the side effects which caused people to become suicidal. Things were really bad for two or three years - I did not go out and I closed myself off.

Treatment for Hepatitis C

17. I have never received treatment for Hepatitis C. In 1999/2000 I was offered Interferon and Ribavirin but after to speaking to my GRO-C GRO-C, she advised me not to because of the flu type side effects

which could last for months. The treatment could potentially have had more adverse effects than positive. I recall talking to Dr Mayne (and potentially Dr Anderson) at the time who said my own immune system was fighting the infection and I did not have to have treatment if I did not want to.

How infected status has impacted on medical treatment and/or dental care

18. Once I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, dentists did not want to know. I have had various issues with my teeth over the years and I had to do everything through the School of Dentistry at the Royal Victoria. Dr Russell treated me - he was a great man and could not do enough. A few years ago I was given the option either going to Antrim Hospital or Ballmoney Hospital. I was born in Ballmoney so I now go there. They are not quite as good as the Royal Victoria, I used to get appointments every six months there. Now I am lucky if I get an annual appointment but saying that, I have an appointment coming up soon so I am not complaining!

Private, family and social life

19. My infection with Hepatitis C has had a big impact on my family. We always went on family holidays with the boys when they were young – we went to Disneyland in 1993 with the older boys and with the younger boy the summer before I was diagnosed. After that, there was no money coming in from me to pay for holidays and I was not going out so that went by the wayside. However, I do remember The Haemophilia Society assisting with breaks away for families affected by haemophilia. I think we went to Clacton on Sea in around 1990 with the children and my parents (my youngest son was not born) and this was before my diagnosis with Hepatitis C. After my diagnosis with Hepatitis C, there was a caravan in Newcastle in Co. Down and another one in Portrush which we could have taken the two younger boys to (the two older boys were too old and would not have wanted to come with us).

20. I really did stop going out and I lost contact with friends who I knew through work and sports, like going to watch the football. I find that I keep myself to myself now.

Stigma

21. My diagnosis with Hepatitis C was a big change for us as a family. People were whispering and that type of thing so I stopped going out socially. I do not think the stigma has impacted my wife and children as much as it has me. If the boys got any grief from their friends because rumours were spreading about me, they would sort it out themselves, that's the type of people they are, they get on with life, and my wife has never told me that it has had an impact on her.

Education, work, financial impact

22. As I have said previously in my statement, I was unwell with jaundice in 1974 and I struggled for two months. I had to take time off from school when I was about to do my O-level exams which was not helpful but I did well in any event.

23. I was originally employed as a Computer Operator and worked my way up to Accounts Assistant and then Transport Manager. Within a week of being diagnosed, I had left my job. I had worked there for 21 years prior to leaving. I have not worked since with the exception of doing unpaid voluntary work. I started to do the voluntary work in 2001 to help with my mental health which involves taking people for doctor and hospital appointments. Since 1998, my wife has been the main bread winner.

24. Due to me being unable to work, the holidays stopped and there was and is pressure to pay the bills. I had to cash in my pension at 57 to alleviate the pressure on my wife. I now do not have any pension income.

Section 6: Treatment, care, support

25. I have never received or been offered counselling in relation to my Hepatitis C diagnosis. However, it is unlikely that I would have accepted the offer as I am not that type of person.

Section 7: Financial assistance

26. The first payment which I recall receiving was a lump sum payment of £20,000 which I think was from The Caxton Foundation but I am not 100% sure. Thus must have been in around 2007 or 2008. This sticks in my mind because my mother wanted to buy a house and it allowed me to help her with that.

27. From 1998 until about three years ago, I was receiving incapacity benefit and then in around January 2017, I started to receive payments from the Infected Blood Payment Scheme for Northern Ireland. My payment category is Hepatitis C Stage 1. Initially I received something like £250 per month which increased to £300 per month and then £340 per month. In November 2017, my incapacity benefit was stopped because the Department for Work and Pensions said I was fit for work, which is not correct but I am not going to go through the stress of arguing about it, particular as I now receive assistance from the Government. At present, I receive £1,564 per month but this is because the payments have been backdated to bring us in line with England, Scotland and Wales. This has been a real boost because it means I can help to take the pressure off my wife.

28. I have received a number of lump sum payments from the Infected Blood Payment Scheme for Northern Ireland. I received £8,419.95 on 14 February 2020 and £6,283.38 on 3 April 2020 (these two payments were to bring Northern Ireland into line with England, Scotland and Wales for the period 2019 to 2020). I also received £7,650,13 on 11 September 2020 (this payment was to bring Northern Ireland into line with England, Scotland and Wales for the period 2020 to 2021).

Section 8: Other issues

29. I hope that the truth will come out of the Inquiry, that someone will put their hands up and admit that they made a mistake by giving us contaminated blood.

30. I am prepared to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry in public should I be asked to do so.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed:…… GRO-C ………………..

Mr Alistair Moore McGonigle

Dated:…………20/1/21……………………..