

Witness Name: **Kevin Mullins**

Statement No.: **WITN3578001**

Exhibits: **None**

Dated: **9-10-2019**

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KEVIN MULLINS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 16 August 2019.

I, Kevin Mullins, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Kevin Mullins. My date of birth is GRO-C 1970 and my address known to the Inquiry. I live with my wife and our two children, aged 12 and 17. I am self-employed, selling rare and collectible CDs online.
2. I have Von Willebrand's disease ("VW"). I intend to speak about how being part of a group with a high risk of serious infection from tainted blood products has had a severe impact on my mental health, despite not being infected myself. In particular, I will speak about how receiving Factor VIII as a child has contributed to the development of chronic anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder ("OCD"), and the impact this has had on mine and my family's life.
3. I confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist me with my statement. The Inquiry team has explained anonymity to me and I do not require any information to be kept private.

Section 2. How Affected

4. My mother has VW, so when I was a young child I was tested and also found to have VW. When I was diagnosed with VW, I was told that it was not severe, my blood would just take a little longer to clot and I would be more likely to bruise. I was told that I would only need to use blood-coagulating products if I underwent surgery.
5. In the summer of 1981, when I was ten years old, I needed to have some of my teeth extracted. When the dentist informed me that I required the extractions and that it would involve going into day-surgery, it was briefly explained to me that I would be treated with Factor VIII, a blood coagulant to thicken my blood. I remember being given the Factor VIII; I was taken into a side room some time before my surgery and connected to an intravenous drip attached to a clear plastic flexi bag filled with orange-yellow liquid.
6. The dental surgery went well and I experienced no physical symptoms after being treated with the Factor VIII product. I have not been treated with Factor VIII since this dental surgery.
7. Although I did not contract any infection from this blood product provided to me in 1981, the fear of being infected with HIV has been the main focus of my anxiety, depression and OCD, as detailed below in Section 5.

Section 3. Other Infections

8. I confirm I have not contracted any infection from the Factor VIII product I received in 1981.

Section 4. Consent

9. I am not aware of any discussion regarding consent to being treated with Factor VIII. At the time I was unaware of any risk of infection, and I am sure my parents were also unaware of any risk.
10. I do not believe I have ever been medically treated or tested without my knowledge or consent.

Section 5. Impact

Impact on my mental health

11. In the early 1980s the AIDS pandemic was attracting widespread media coverage. I remember watching extremely chilling adverts with slogans like 'don't die of ignorance' alongside images of gravestones. When this media attention about AIDS began, I was not initially concerned that I may be at risk of infection as I remember it being described as a gay-related illness.
12. I am unable to remember exactly when the first mention of AIDS being linked to blood disorders was, but I would have been a young teenager at the time. I regularly watched and read the news and it was at this point that my anxiety in relation to being infected with HIV began. I would tell myself that there was nothing to worry about, but every time I heard a mention of AIDS on the news, I grew more and more anxious. I do recall mentioning to my parents that people with bleeding disorders were being diagnosed with AIDS, but they assured me that I would not have contracted it. This only put my mind to rest for a brief period. I was having a constant battle in my own head; one side thinking that so much is known about the disease that I can't be infected, the other saying that I need to get tested.
13. Despite not being sexually active, I grew increasingly paranoid about my sexual health. I became convinced that there was something wrong with my genitals (maybe a venereal disease) and that I needed a circumcision. I lived in constant fear that I was HIV positive. I was terrified that if I needed an operation, such as a circumcision, that it would be discovered that I had HIV. I was also aware

that there was a substantial wait for the results of HIV tests and I did not feel able to cope with the stress this would cause.

14. I remember one occasion when I was about fourteen years old and we were going to be learning about sexual health at school. I lied to my mum and pretended I was ill in order to get the day off. I didn't want to hear about sexual diseases as I was in constant fear that I had one.

15. I became so convinced that I was infected with HIV that I remember boiling my family's toothbrushes each day as I was terrified that I would infect one of them if my toothbrush came into contact with theirs. They would all wonder what had happened to their toothbrushes as the boiling water would melt them, but I never confessed to my actions.

16. One day when I was 18 or 19 years old, I broke down. I was in my bedroom and I cried for hours. I was suffering with IBS and I had been trying to ignore all of my anxieties about my health and get on with my life, but I couldn't. My mum came into my room and I remember telling her that I wanted to stop living. Even though I was confessing to her that I was struggling with my health, I still did not tell her about my fear of being infected with HIV.

17. My mum took me to see our family GP. After an examination I was reassured I didn't have a venereal disease but was referred for a circumcision. Because of the circumcision procedure, I also needed to take a test for my VW to check my bleeding levels. I was terrified that the tests would confirm I was HIV positive.

18. Sometime after I attended the doctor for the VW tests, I received a call saying that something had gone wrong and the tests needed to be re-done. I was referred to the Cheltenham General Hospital Haematology Department.

19. At the appointment, the Head of Haematology was present and it was my interaction with him that really triggered my severe paranoia of HIV infection. I told him that I was worried that I had been infected with HIV since I was treated with Factor VIII in 1981, and asked him if there was actually any risk of such

infection. I remember he, very plainly, said, "Yes, there is a chance." I said surely I would be ill by now if I had been infected, and he replied that the odds of that were about 50/50. I told him that I had been treated with a factor product in Bristol to which he said there was about a 1 in 100,000 chance that I had been infected with HIV. At that moment, what I can only describe as a 'black fear' came over me.

20. I was not offered an HIV test at that point. The Head of Haematology simply recommended that I get tested. He spoke to me as if it was nothing to him. He clearly did not appreciate how big a worry it was for me.

21. My sister had come with me to the appointment and we went for a walk around the shops afterward, but I was just in an anxious daze. My sister could see this and was doing everything she could to reassure me that I would be ok. Looking back, my mum now says that she: GRO-C that doctor if she ever got her hands on him as his blasé and dismissive answers to my questions compounded my mental health issues.

22. I did not seek an HIV test at this point; I attempted to carry on with a normal life, attempting to reassure myself that I was fine.

23. Around this time, my OCD really began to develop. I was constantly washing my hands and devising routines for doing so, such as washing the tap and then washing my hands again repeatedly. I avoided contact with other people as much as possible. My OCD was self-reinforcing, getting gradually worse as the obsessions took over my life. OCD was not widely recognised at this time and it was humiliating to have people notice my routines.

24. I had recently started a new job around this period, working for a magazine called Car Finder. I remember worrying that other people thought I was weird because of my OCD-related behaviours: covering my hands with my jumper to open doors, being stuck in the toilet for up to half an hour as I washing my hands over and over and not wanting to open the doors.

25. My OCD gradually grew to all aspects of my life; it would take me an hour and a half to do a twenty-minute car journey as I would constantly have to pull over, convinced that I was running pedestrians over and killing them or running other car drivers off the road. Often, I would sit in my car and cry through my lunch break. My driving eventually got so bad that I had to be rescued by my father and brother on the way home one evening, when I hadn't arrived home and was very late. This obviously caused my family a great deal of worry.
26. Around 1990/1991, my parents got so worried that they went to our GP and urged him to get me help as they were at the end of their tether and very worried about my mental health. They also went to speak to my boss about my anxiety and OCD. The doctor said he would contact the relevant department urgently and also suggested I had an HIV test. I had the HIV test mid-week and had to wait for about a week for the results.
27. A few days after the test, but before receiving my results, I went to a party at the weekend. I remember being at the buffet and eating a very hard piece of pastry that cut my gum. In that moment I convinced myself that the food may have been prepared by someone with HIV and that I could have contracted the virus at this point. I convinced myself that the results of the test would be pointless as I could have been infected since, or so I believed. My OCD would make me think very unrealistic things, but they felt like a real possibility to me. This also highlights the naivety of how HIV can be transmitted. The information available at the time was very poor.
28. I don't know how, but I managed to get through the week. My mum rang the doctor and he confirmed that the test was negative and that I was fine. I remember having to fake happiness with the result. I didn't feel at all positive and remained unconvinced that I was still not at risk of HIV infection. The doctor did reassure me that I could not contract HIV through food, but my related OCD behaviours persisted.
29. Not long after my first HIV test, my mum arranged for me to see an HIV counsellor, David Owen. I went to see David and he asked me if I had been

tested for Hepatitis C ("HCV") which was then a whole new infection for me to worry about.

30. I arranged an HCV test in Cheltenham. On the way to the test, it was pouring with rain and my car broke down. I sat in my car thinking about how I couldn't carry on. I wanted to end it all. David managed to find me and took me to the appointment. After a week of heavy depression and worry I received the results that the test was clear. I was able to accept that I did not have HCV, but, for some reason, I remained persistently convinced that I needed to worry about an HIV infection.

31. Shortly after this incident, I began seeing a therapist called Steve Williams-Connolly. At my first appointment he asked me to write down all the OCD-related thoughts that I had. Over the period of a week I produced 19 sides of A4 paper detailing the thoughts I was having. Steve was a marvellous man and he helped me get my routines under control surprisingly quickly. Thanks to Steve's help, I came off anti-depressants around 1994. I was doing a lot better during this period. I was still washing my hands a lot, but was able to control the impulses and began to lead a relatively normal life. I was able to go on holiday, and socialise with friends.

32. In 1997, Steve, was sadly killed in a motorcycle accident. He was my crutch and his death sent me on another downward spiral. I went back on anti-depressants. Knowing he wouldn't be there to speak to when I was struggling was devastating. I found out some years later through a conversation with Steve's boss, that Steve had gotten in trouble for not discharging me; I was with him for a number of years and we had a very good relationship.

Impact on family and relationships

33. I met my wife Anna in the winter of 1996. The relationship moved very quickly; we met in December and were living together by February the following year.

[GRO-C] I was fine with. But after a while, I began to worry again about HIV. My constant worrying did impact the relationship. [GRO-C] Anna felt

that she would not be able to cope with the stress of my mental health problems. I was relying on Anna a lot, but the relationship maintained. I had another HIV test during this period, which was also negative.

34. In early 2004, I was going through a deep depression and it began to take a serious toll on my marriage. My HIV-related anxiety had returned and I was constantly worrying about infection again, which was upsetting for Anna. By this time, we had our first child. Anna and I split up for a short period of time, during which Anna had a brief relationship with someone else. When we got back together, I was initially much better. But soon, I began to fear that Anna had been exposed to HIV.

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35. The impact of my mental health on my relationship with my wife has been tremendous. I always feel wary of the next trigger and Anna takes it upon herself to ensure the environment is as minimally triggering for my OCD as possible, which puts pressure on her. Anna works in social care and I struggle to accept that her work involves interacting with things that I have issues with, such as diabetic needles. Anna says that she would have gone into nursing, but we both know that our relationship would not have lasted if she had. I feel very guilty for not allowing her that opportunity to further her career.

36. In addition, both of my children now display the

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I strongly believe that it is a learned behaviour and they have developed OCD as a result of watching me. It upsets me greatly to think that they will have to go through it all because of me.

37. In February 2015, a very close friend rang to tell me that he had been diagnosed with HIV. He had been infected for ten years but did not know. At first, I coped well. But after a week or so, I became very nervous and the anxiety returned. He asked me to go and see him several times, but as the anxiety built, I did not feel able to. I started to have terrible thoughts about him bleeding or having

needles in his pockets if we were to meet. Unfortunately, my friend very nearly died whilst in a coma and he now has HIV-related dementia, which has affected his mental health and made me unable to have any contact with him whatsoever, due to him being unpredictable. In affect I have lost a good friend.

38. This all made me go back into a very dark place. I started to drink heavily and was living in pure anxiety. I remember being on holiday around this time, in Majorca. I walked out onto the balcony during the night and was thinking about ending it all there and then. I lose my entire personality when I'm in these low points and nothing can be done to bring me out of it.

Impact on education and work

39. As mentioned in the paragraphs above, my anxiety and OCD has impacted my schooling and work-life. Although I had managed to forge a successful career, eventually, I had to give up my job. In my last role I was employed as the General Manager of a chain of hearing centres. My bosses didn't properly understand my issues and I felt like I was on the verge of a breakdown. The stress was too much, and they had reduced my support team as well. I finally had to leave my job after being there for 10 years. I took a chance on turning my part time business into a full-time venture and thankfully I am able to make a living from it, albeit a much lower income than I was used to, and we now rely on Universal Credit to make ends meet.

Continuing impact

40. I continue to suffer from anxiety in relation to my fear of infection. In 2006, I returned home from a run and found some blood on my leg, but I had no injury. Something as trivial as this was enough to trigger months of anxiety and depression. I had to get another HIV test, which means at least three months of worrying. I remember going into work during that period and not even being able to pretend I was all right.

41. Of course, it is impossible to prove that I would not have suffered with anxiety if I had not been treated with Factor VIII on that single occasion, but I am certain the OCD was brought on by the impact of the Factor VIII treatment and I believe

my life would have been very different if I hadn't had it. All of my mental health problems have stemmed from my persistent fear of HIV infection. The fear of AIDS that was stirred up during the 1980s has stayed with me throughout my life. Though I do feel able to cope with it more effectively in recent years, it will always be there and it has had a huge impact on my relationship and my family. Something as simple as getting a haircut or taking out the bins can still set off my anxiety to this day. I am still on anti-depressants and have been for the best part of thirty years. I have had 3 more courses of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy since 2015, which has enabled me to keep relatively depression free, but I still often struggle from various trigger events.

42. My VW is so mild that I no longer have to be treated with blood products at all. When I underwent the circumcision, I was treated with a synthetic product, Desmopressin and, ever since, it has never been considered necessary to treat me with blood products.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

43. As detailed above, I have sought therapy and have completed various courses of CBT, the most recent of which has been quite successful and has allowed me to develop techniques to keep my OCD under control. I have also tried hypnotherapy.
44. In spring 2007, I participated in a Channel 4 TV programme called 'Hypochondriacs: I Told You I Was Ill'. Channel 4 contacted me through an OCD forum I used. As part of the programme, I worked with a psychologist who put me into difficult situations in a bid to treat my OCD. They got me to go into a public toilet with splatters of fake blood on the fixtures and also the toilet of a gay bar. I felt that the show portrayed me as being homophobic and afraid of gay people. I have some gay friends, one of whom is a close friend, so this hurt me. It was only after the show aired that I saw how the programme had been edited to portray me in this bad light. When I questioned the producers about it, they said it was 'tongue-in-cheek'.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

45. I have never applied for financial assistance in connection to my health issues. My mum has helped financially in the past, and at one point my previous employer assisted for paying for my therapy. I have always paid the full price for my anti-depressant prescriptions.

Section 8. Other Issues

46. A couple of months ago, I was contacted by Bristol Royal Infirmary, completely out of the blue. I was asked if I had been treated with Factor VIII at that hospital and, when I said yes, I was advised to get a test for HIV and HCV. I found the conversation to be quite bizarre.

47. I found out about the Inquiry from the news and Twitter. I wanted to share my story and, although not infected myself, the impact that the scandal has had on my life.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____

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Dated _____

9.10.2019