Witness Name: Graham Freeman
Statement No.: WITN0569001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 5 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRAHAM FREEMAN

I provide this statement in response to two requests made under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, both dated 25 January 2019.

I, Graham Freeman, say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Graham Freeman. I was born on GRO-C 1941. I reside at GRO-C in New South Wales, Australia.

2. I lived in England from 1941 to 1967. I migrated to Australia in 1967. I then returned to England in 1973, before returning to Australia in 1975.

3. I live with my wife Christine Freeman and son Paul Freeman. I also have two daughters. I suffer from a number of health issues, including hemophilia A, diabetes, prostate cancer, problems with my eyesight and spontaneous bleeding into my joints. I have recently had shoulder replacement surgery and knee replacement surgery. I previously suffered from Hepatitis C.

4. In this witness statement I speak about my Hepatitis C. In particular, I discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on me and my family.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was infected with Hepatitis C sometime between 1946 and 1964 by National Health Service blood products. During that period, I was administered blood transfusions, cryoprecipitate and plasma. I don't know which treatment infected me with Hepatitis C.

6. Between 1946 and 1964, I had a number of health problems which required blood transfusions:

   (a) Between 1946 and around 1962, I experienced heavy nose bleeds. The more severe nose bleeds were treated at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham. My nose bleeds became less severe after a Cerebral Hemorrhage which I describe below in paragraph (c).

   (b) At some point before 1962, I suffered an eye socke~~d~~t injury, which resulted in bleeding in my eye socket which drained and then filled up again. I received a blood transfusion as part of the treatment for this injury. The injury was again treated at Selly Oak Hospital.

   (c) In 1962, I suffered from a Cerebral Hemorrhage. I also received a blood transfusion as part of the treatment for the hemorrhage. I was treated at the Neurology Hospital in Birmingham City.

7. Between around 1962 and 1967, Dr Price, a local General Practitioner, diagnosed me with Non-A, Non-B Hepatitis. I was not given any further information at this time about the diagnosis or its consequences. I was not told how Dr Price arrived at his diagnosis or what had prompted it.

8. I suffered two further injuries following my Non-A, Non-B Hepatitis, for which I received treatment in England:

(a) In 1967, I sustained a knee and wrist injury, which required a blood transfusion. I was treated for this injury at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

(b) In 1974, I sustained a further wrist injury from a screwdriver while I was at work. The injury did not initially result in much bleeding but, while my wound was being inspected, poking of my arm gave rise to bleeding. This injury also required a blood transfusion. I was again treated at Selly Oak Hospital.

9. I was not given warnings about the risks associated with the treatments described above in paragraphs 5, 6 and 8 prior to those treatments being administered. When I was in hospital for treatment described above at paragraphs 6 and 8, blood tests were performed on me. I was not made aware of the purpose of those tests. I relied on my doctors to administer the appropriate tests and treatment. I did not question their decisions and was simply happy to get relief from my health problems.

10. In around 1986, after I had permanently settled in Australia, I attended the Westmead Hospital Liver Clinic in Sydney for liver tests. I was referred to a liver specialist by my local General Practitioner, who had raised concerns about my liver function as a result of blood tests. The specialist then referred me to the clinic. At the Westmead Hospital Liver Clinic, I was treated by Professor Geoff Farrell.

11. Between 1986 and the early 1990s, I underwent testing and check-ups at the Westmead Hospital Liver Clinic. In particular:

(a) in 1986, Professor Farrell performed a liver biopsy and determined that there was an abnormality with my liver;

(b) in 1989, I underwent a lumbar puncture procedure; and

(c) in 1991, I underwent a second liver biopsy. This biopsy confirmed that I suffered from Hepatic Fibrosis. Professor Farrell also confirmed at this point that I had Hepatitis C.

12. At the time Professor Farrell informed me of my Hepatitis C diagnosis, he indicated that it would have devastating consequences if it was left untreated, including cirrhosis.

13. Professor Farrell told me that Hepatitis C was infectious. I was also told at this point that personal hygiene was important, that I ought to use protection when having sex, that I should not engage in kissing and that I should be careful about wounds involving blood and keep them covered.

14. Professor Farrell was the first person to give me detailed information about Hepatitis C. I was not contacted by the National Health Service or any of my treating doctors between my departure from England in 1974 and the diagnosis of my Hepatitis C in 1991.

15. To the best of my knowledge, I was not treated with Factor VIII products until around the mid-1980s after I had relocated to Australia. I was administered Factor VIII products in Australia from around the mid-1980s, after I was placed under the care of a Haematologist named Professor Jerry Koutts.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. I am not aware of any other infections that I received as a result of being given infected blood products.

Section 4. Consent

17. As I have described above at paragraph 9, I was not given any warnings about the risks associated with blood transfusions, cryoprecipitate and plasma. Although I consented to being treated, I believe that I was treated and tested without being given adequate or full information.

18. In addition, when I was placed in an induced coma while being treated for the Cerebral Hemorrhage described above at paragraph 6(c), I understand that tests were performed on me to which I was unable to consent and the nature of which were not explained to me afterwards. I was informed by my wife, Christine, and believe that these tests were not explained to her at the time they were performed.

Section 5. Impact

19. After my Hepatitis C diagnosis, I was treated in an isolation ward at Westmead Hospital. When I have received dental care, the procedures were carried out under isolation in hospital. Everything was labelled 'carrier of Hepatitis C' and staff wore gowns, masks, gloves. I felt embarrassed, contaminated, devastated and as if I was being judged all the time. At times, I have felt victimised.

20. On 29 August 1992, in the year following my Hepatitis C diagnosis, the Water Board terminated my employment as a Water Pollution Control Plant Operator on medical grounds. In doing so, they alleged that my Hemophilia meant that I was unfit for work under relevant occupational health and safety legislation. They said that because I couldn't bend my knees and squat that I wasn't fit for the job. The Water Board was trying to reduce its number of staff at this time but I felt that this was an easy way out for my employer and saw my medical termination as a way of getting rid of me.

21. Between around November 1992 and May 1993, I commenced using a drug called Interferon as part of a research trial which Professor Farrell had placed me on. At the conclusion of this trial, it was determined that Interferon had not been effective in treating my Hepatitis C.

22. From around May or June 1993, I then participated in a trial involving a mix of Interferon and a drug called Ribavirin. The results of the trial,

which were provided to me in August 1994, showed that the combination of the Interferon and Ribavirin was successful.

23. During the period that I was involved in the Interferon and Ribavirin drug studies I felt 'mind-boggled'. During the trials, I suffered daily from headaches, nausea and hot and cold sweats. I spent most of my days in bed too tired or too sick to do anything. I experienced stress, depression, anxiety and hypertension. I had to see a psychologist to talk about how I could manage my mental state and what was happening to me.

24. Initially, injections of Interferon were administered at Westmead Hospital, which is approximately 30 minutes from my home in Sydney. As a result of the inconvenience of travelling to and from the hospital my wife began administering from home. Over time, my stomach became so inflamed that my wife had to administer injections into my back.

25. At around the time of the drug trials, my wife ceased her employment as a shift manager at a large Australian retailer so that she could be at home with me. Within a short period of time, we went from having two incomes to living off social security payments of approximately $11,000 per annum. At this point, my wife and I had three children and a mortgage. As a result of the Hepatitis C diagnosis and associated treatment, we suffered financial hardship, had difficulties meeting ~~of~~ our mortgage payments and our standard of living decreased significantly. We struggled to make ends meet.

26. I have experienced the stigma associated with Hepatitis C. On the rare occasions I have told people about my diagnosis, I have observed them becoming concerned about becoming exposed to the virus. We were asked not to attend a wedding because of the concern that I would infect people. As a result, I have avoided discussing the condition with friends and family. I have felt embarrassed and have always been conscious of other people finding out that I was infected or that I might be contagious. My social life has also suffered because my wife and I have been

concerned that people would talk about my condition and I would be victimised.

27. Hepatitis C has also affected my relationship with my family. I was unable to kiss my wife and children and had to take great care with personal hygiene around our home.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

28. After I was ultimately diagnosed with Hepatitis C in 1991, and while the virus remained active, I received treatment and support. I received support from a psychologist, which I found to be a great help. He talked and listened to me but never questioned me. However, after the treatment of the virus ceased in around 1994 all of the support stopped.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

29. I sought financial assistance from the Skipton Fund after hearing about it from my brother or sister who were living in the United Kingdom. There was no support in Australia for haemophiliacs with Hepatitis C of the kind available in England. If it wasn't for hearing about the Skipton Fund from my siblings in the United Kingdom, it is unlikely I would have found out about the scheme. Information was not sent or passed on to me in Australia and I was initially unaware there were avenues for assistance.

30. After becoming aware of the Skipton Fund, one of my children helped me find information on the internet. I sent in my paperwork and waited to see what would happen. The claim was ultimately accepted and I received a Stage 1 Hepatitis C Virus payment of £20,000.

31. In around mid-2006, I applied for a Stage 2 payment. The assessment of that application was deferred because I failed to reach the "trigger point". The letter informing me of the deferred assessment noted that some of the information I had provided was out of date.

32. I found it difficult to retrieve all of the medical information required for the Stage 2 application as Professor Farrell, who was my liver specialist, had left Westmead Hospital to take up a position in Canberra and my Haematologist, Professor Koutts, had passed away. As a result, I found it difficult to obtain my files and relevant information. I also thought that the paperwork involved in the application was too difficult to complete. I sought the assistance of another doctor to help fill out my application.

33. My daughter has also applied for grants through the EIBSS for assistance with accommodation modifications and repairs, hospital travel costs, mobility aids, car repairs and funeral pre-payments. To obtain payments, I was asked to provide correspondence from an occupational therapist, local authority or social services. This process was time-consuming and stressful, particularly given the differences in services between the United Kingdom and Australia.

34. In addition to the Stage 1 Hepatitis C Virus payment which I have referred to above at paragraph 30, I have received the following payments:

    (a) in 2016, I received a payment of £3,500, which included the winter fuel payment and a one ~~of~~ off lump sum for 2016/2017;

    (b) from April 2017, I received regular monthly payments of £252.50 from the Skipton Fund;

    (c) between November 2017 and 1 December 2018, I received the following payments:

        (i) a payment of £872.56 from the NHS Business Authority on 30 November 2017;

        (ii) a payment of £1,299.02 from the NHS Business Authority on 19 January 2018;

(iii) a payment of £1729.43 from the NHS Business Authority on 20 April 2018;

(iv) a payment of £168.05 from the NHS Business Authority on 19 July 2018;

(v) a payment of £455.36 from the NHS Business Authority on 25 September 2018; and

(vi) a payment of £519, described as a 'Winter Fuel Payment' on 1 December 2018.

35. Aside from the Stage 1 Skipton Fund payment and the payments listed above at paragraph 34, to the best of my knowledge I have never received any other financial assistance or compensation from any other department or government for the contraction of Hepatitis C virus from National Health Service ~~Blood~~.

36. I believe should have been granted the Stage 2 Skipton Fund payment. I feel I should be paid compensation for the amount of financial hardship and stress I have endured.

Section 8. Other Issues

37. In 1991, I had a fall at work and crushed my heel suffering internal bleeding. I was given blood products and Factor 8. I still had Hepatitis C virus showing up. The injury aggravated my blood counts and I had liver reactions. I was put in an isolation ward because of my Hepatitis C.

38. After treatment, I returned to work but struggled with the work and the pressure from management to take a redundancy package. I refused to take the package as I was scared for our family's financial security. I was stressed and angry. This didn't help my mental or physical health.

39. At this time my Hepatitis C virus seemed to be escalating. I my employer if I could take some annual leave which was approved 27 September

1991 to 13 November 1991. When I returned from leave management told me I had to undergo certain objective tests to remain in the position I was employed for. Being a haemophiliac, I could not fulfil the minimum level of fitness for working in confined spaces.

40. The Water Board said they would contravene provisions of the legislation and had no other alternative but to retire me on medical grounds. My workers' compensation claim for the fall was already in progress. I believe that the Water Board used my medical condition and my low self-esteem and mental health to justify my dismissal. This was at a time when I was most vulnerable and my health was very poor.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **GRO-C**

Dated 5 February 2019