Witness Name: Dhian Singh Gill
Statement No.: WITN0728/001
Exhibits: nil
Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DHIAN SINGH GILL

GRO-C

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 27 February 2019.

I, Dhian Singh Gill, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Dhian Singh Gill. My date of birth is GRO-C 1954 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am an administrator for the Metropolitan Police. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV"), which I contracted as a result of being given contaminated Factor VIII to treat my mild haemophilia A. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

2. 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.

Section 2. How Infected

3. I discovered I was a mild haemophiliac in 1976 after having my tonsils taken out. I bled a lot throughout the night and the doctor checked my throat and said I had to stay in the hospital for four weeks because I kept haemorrhaging. It took some time and the opinions of more than one doctor, but I was finally told that I had mild haemophilia.

4. I remember the doctor decided to check my sister's son as well because of the way haemophilia can be passed down in a family, but he was fine.

5. Despite being a haemophiliac, I have always loved playing sport and, when I was growing up, I played a lot of football. This would lead to a lot of bleeds because I was so active and would get kicked a lot in my legs.

6. Living with haemophilia was normal for me. I would never inject myself with Factor VIII; I would always go to the hospital for them to inject me whenever I had a bleed. I cannot recall how many times I was injected with Factor VIII over the years because it is just normal life to me, but I do remember having to go to Lewisham Hospital, my local Hospital, every three to six months to have my blood checked.

7. In 1993, my stomach became very painful and was causing me a lot of discomfort so I called the family GP so he could examine me. When he came, he said I must have been drinking too much tea or coffee and if I reduce my intake, the pain should go away.

8. However, when the pain did not improve, I decided to go to Lewisham Hospital for a more in depth check-up. I had some blood tests done and Dr Boomrah, one of the doctors assigned to me, told me that I had HCV.

9. He did not tell me what HCV was or the risks associated with having a virus like HCV. Looking back, I do not recall ever being told about the risk of being exposed to infections as a result of the blood products I was receiving. The only thing discussed was my drinking habits and I told him I drink one beer a day. I also do not recall having any biopsies of my liver done or any scans either.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I do not believe that as a result of being given infected blood products I have contracted any infection other than HCV.

Section 4. Consent

11. When I was diagnosed with HCV in 1993, I was tested without my knowledge or consent.

12. I do not believe that I have been tested for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

13. The mental and physical effects that I have suffered as a result of being infected with HCV are far-reaching and still affect me to this day.

14. In July 1996, I began my first treatment for the HCV, which involved injecting my stomach with Interferon everyday. As far as I can remember, I did not suffer from any negative effects from the treatment, but by January 1997, I stopped the treatment because it was not making a difference to my health.

15. In 2002, Lewisham Hospital informed me that there was a new treatment available to help treat HCV and encouraged me to try it. I remember Pamela Anderson announced that she had HCV and was

being treated with a similar treatment so I decided to try it. The treatment involved 3 injections of Interferon, similar to the treatment I did in 1996 and once again, it did not work.

16. I lost a lot of weight and could not even speak properly; my whole temperament was different. I also struggled to walk properly and was always really tired and lethargic. It was a difficult time for me. Even going to work was a struggle because I had to catch a bus to the office everyday.

17. I remember there was a particular morning where I wanted to get some orange juice from downstairs around 2am. Typically, I always wash my glass before I use it, but before I could rinse the glass and pour my drink, I collapsed on the floor and I remember my wife woke me up.

18. My wife called the ambulance and when they came I asked them to take me to Lewisham Hospital but they decided to take me to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich. After being there for some time, my son came and I asked him to take me to Lewisham Hospital as this is what I was accustomed to and where I do all of my routine tests.

19. When we arrived at Lewisham Hospital, the nurse said there were two people waiting to be seen before me and she asked if I could wait. I replied and said: "Does it look like I can wait?" The nurse looked at me and immediately took me through to see the doctor.

20. The doctor took one look at me and thought I had a stroke, but it was the treatment having its affect on me. The doctor decided to take me off the treatment as my body was rejecting the Interferon. But the damage had already been done. My life has never been the same since starting the treatment.

21. The depression I felt was indescribable; it honestly cannot be put into words. I could not sit with my grandson out of the fear of harming him or myself because of my depression. I would sometimes touch my head and hurt myself without even realising it, so I did not want to take the risk of hurting anyone else.

22. Throughout the treatment, I would also have the craziest thoughts that were pretty scary. I would think about leaving home and never coming back and I knew these thoughts were not my own natural thoughts. It was the start of an awful time for me.

23. As the hospital said there were no other treatments available at the time, I had to continue my life as normally as I could. I continued to go to Lewisham Hospital every three to six months for regular blood tests and I would still get Factor VIII when necessary. I did have an operation on my bowels and had a vasectomy as well. I had to have blood transfusions, but everything went smoothly.

24. In 2008, Lewisham Hospital told me that there was another treatment that I could try to treat my HCV. It involved taking 6 Ribavirin tablets a day and one pegylated Interferon injection in my stomach once a week. I completed the treatment in 40 weeks and thankfully; my HCV has been cleared completely and the doctor said I would never get HCV again however, the effects the treatment have had on me physically, mentally and emotionally will never go away.

25. The treatment was so intense that it took me almost two years to go back to work. I felt awful. I still feel awful. I just felt so weak all the time and I could not walk far distances because I would get tired very quickly. I had trouble sleeping most of the time as well. My depression was at an all time low. I was always anxious and somewhat moody as well. Staying home made it worse, but going to work was not an option either, with the way I felt. I couldn't even walk straight and I had lost all hope of ever getting better. I asked the Metropolitan Police

for medical retirement and they did not grant it to me because they expected me to make a full recovery. I had completely given up so it was surprising that they didn't grant it to me. Thankfully, I did not lose any of my salary as the Metropolitan Police paid me sick pay in full, which was good.

26. My work life definitely changed as a result being diagnosed with HCV because I did not have the strength to work long hours. My job have been very supportive and when was I eventually able to return back to work, I was able to change my hours to part-time, so now, I work four days a week for 7 hours and 12 minutes a day. My line manager is very understanding and I know that if I didn't feel supported I am hoping to retire on 30 November this year if all goes well.

27. My social life did not change much as a result of being diagnosed with HCV. I had to stop playing football, which was my main sport growing up because, physically my body could not handle it.

28. I never felt the stigma of having HCV; everyone treated me the same. However, if anyone ever said anything about me having HCV, I would always say that I did not get HCV from blood from the USA, because I think there is a stigma associated with that. I always try and make that clear to people.

29. My family have been impacted by my HCV diagnosis as well, especially my wife. She has to do the majority of the housework because I do not have the strength to help her myself. I cannot use sharp things like knives because of the risk of cutting myself, so my wife has to do all the cooking as well. I would love to do my share of work around the house, but because of the effects of the HCV treatment, I simply cannot do it and that is tough.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

30. When I finished my treatment in 2002, one of the main effects that I had to deal with was the depression. I had a psychiatric assessment in 2002 to assess my mental health. In 2007, I went back to my doctor because I was still suffering with my mental health and another psychiatrist assessed me. I was told that I didn't have a mental illness and was discharged from psychiatric services in 2007.

31. In 2010, I went back to see a psychiatrist and I was sent to the mental health department in Erith Hospital. When I spoke to the nurse at the Hospital, she referred me back to my GP so that I could be referred for primary care counselling on the NHS and be prescribed an anti-depressant.

32. I went to my GP for the counselling but there was a waiting list. There was no way of moving up the waiting list because only policy office staff were entitled to NHS counselling, not civil staff like myself. My son and daughter-in-law found a private counsellor and I did that for some time until I was given NHS counselling. I had about six sessions with the NHS counsellor and they were very productive, but it was a shame that the NHS counselling was not available when I needed it.

33. When I went to the mental health department in Erith Hospital, I was told that I should have come earlier as the treatment I was given was inevitably going to lead to depression. This was shocking to hear at the time because I knew how I felt, but was told I was okay. I strongly feel that the Hospital did not take enough precautions with my mental health early on and this in turn made it worse down the line. I was prescribed Fluoxetine and I still take them now. I will say that my mental health has improved a lot since being on the tablets, but I know that if I do not take them; I will be back at square one again.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. I was told about the Skipton Fund and I received some help filling in the application form from Lewisham Hospital. I received a special payment of £20,000 that was paid directly into my bank account. After that, I received an annual payment of £500 towards winter fuel and £4,000 every quarter, which later increased to £4,500.

35. I never experienced any difficulties in receiving the money from the Skipton Fund. I was told I was entitled to it so I just applied and received it straight away.

36. When the new England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) came into force, I did not understand the application form. I took it to my GP and he filled it in for me. The hospital did not need to add any other information to the form so again; it was not a difficult process.

Section 8. Other Issues

37. Even though I have been completely cleared from HCV, I am not and will never be 100% again. I still feel the effects to this very day. I would like the chairman to look into increasing the amount of financial support we are currently receiving. I have to say that the financial assistance provided as a whole is not bad at all, but if more could be provided, that would be a big help.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 25/4/19