

Witness Name: Peter Freeman

Statement No.: WITN0732001

Exhibits:

Dated: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PETER FREEMAN**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 February 2019.

I, Peter Freeman, will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is name is Peter Freeman. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1945 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a retired salesman and now run two business with my wife. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me and the impact it has had on me and my family.

#### **Section 2. How Infected**

2. I first broke my nose at the age of 14 - it was broken fairly regularly from that age. As an adult I had a sinus clearance operation because my septum was so badly displaced that it was blocking one of my nasal passages, but I continued to have constant sinus issues. Due to these issues, I required a

sinus operation in early 1975, when I was around 30 years old. During the operation I know that I received something, either a transfusion or a blood product. I was told when I came round from the operation by one of the ward staff (I think it was the ward Sister) that I had received some sort of "blood infusion."

3. I do not know why I received blood or a blood product during the operation. I was not told before-hand that this would be required, so it may have been because of an emergency or, having seen how much a nose can bleed, a transfusion may have been commonplace. I was not warned in advance that there was a risk of requiring a transfusion or that there were any risks associated with having one. I was also not told when I came round from the operation that I was at risk of having acquired an infection from the blood or blood product. At the time doctors were doctors and you just trusted them. It wasn't part of a surgeon's job to be nice to people, they were there to do a job for which I admire them immensely.
4. I should have been in hospital to recover from the operation for around 4 days but I was in hospital for well over week. Even after I came home from the hospital I was still suffering from flu-like symptoms. At the time I was discharged my GP, based at Marshall Road in Rainham, was unavailable because he was ill so I just got on with it.
5. Around 6 months after the operation an Indonesian gentleman appeared on my doorstep and introduced himself as something along the lines of the Area Medical Officer for Health. He said he was based in Aylesford, just outside Maidstone. He came into the house and asked me about how my health was before the operation and how long I had been incapacitated. I told him that I hadn't felt right since the operation. He never explained why he was there and didn't offer me any advice or tell me to see my doctor. When he left he told me that I would hear from him but I never did and I put it out of my mind.
6. I had been a blood donor for a long time and so within a year of my operation, I don't remember exactly when, I went to give blood. I had to

declare whether or not I'd had an operation recently on a form when I registered at the donor centre. I completed the form and told them that I had received surgery. I remember being told by one of the staff, I think it was the person who registered the donors, that I couldn't donate because I had hepatitis C.

7. I wasn't given any advice about what having hepatitis C meant, either in terms of my own health or how to prevent the people around me from becoming infected. I also don't ever remember receiving a letter telling me about the diagnosis. Whilst I wasn't expecting to be told I had hepatitis C I wouldn't say that I was hugely shocked simply because I tend to be quite blasé about my own health, I feel like there are too many other things to be getting on with. I tend to just be that way. It may or may not be a good thing, but that's how I am.

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

8. I do not believe that I have received any other infections as a result of my treatment with blood or blood products.

### **Section 4. Consent**

9. I do not remember consenting to be tested for hepatitis C but I must have been tested at some point after my operation in 1975 but before I tried to donate blood in 1975 or 1976. I do not know when this happened.

### **Section 5. Impact**

10. I didn't feel better for about 5 or 6 years after my operation but my symptoms, mainly extreme exhaustion, would come in waves rather than being constant. Some days I would wake up and feel like today was the day that I would climb Everest and by 9am I would be totally out of it asleep.

11. I worked as a salesman for an American company at the time of my infection. This required me to travel a lot as I covered quite a sizeable area of the country. The ethos of the company was that they didn't take kindly to time off so I just got on with it. I did a lot of driving for my job and I remember I would be driving along in Dorset and I would pull into a farm gateway because I was tired. An hour later I would still be there fast asleep. I didn't really have a lot of time off, I just kept working through the exhaustion. There were a few occasions where the exhaustion was so bad that I would have maybe 10 days off but that was all. I was fortunate that while I worked for a tough company my immediate line management were very fair. I had no qualms when things were very bad about phoning my boss and working from home by taking phone calls and doing other more arms-length work.
12. I couldn't face alcohol at all during this period of 5 or 6 years after my infection. My life on the road had previously involved lunches in pubs, which were usually a pie and a pint but I just couldn't face the pint at all. I didn't miss the alcohol though, I'd just drink pints of tonic water. I also couldn't face milk, this was especially difficult as tea was a lifeline to me and suddenly I couldn't drink it if it had milk in it.
13. After some considerable time I went to see Dr Parry at the Rainham GP surgery because I was permanently tired. He thought that I might be glucose intolerant, or have diabetes. I had several tests done at Maidstone hospital, these included blood tests, and the results showed that my glucose levels were raised.
14. I think that the tiredness I had been suffering from was causing me to self-medicate to try and stop the fatigue. I would pour myself glasses of fruit squash and put a spoon of salt and a spoon of sugar into them to help keep myself awake. I was told that I had a glucose intolerance and this seemed to explain, in combination with an exhausting job, why I was so tired. No one has ever discussed the symptoms of hepatitis C with me, whereas I know that exhaustion is a classic sign of diabetes. I remember at one point my doctor asked me why I was even surprised that I was tired given my lifestyle. It didn't cross my mind that it might be something else. When I was around

60 the doctor confirmed that I was now diabetic and needed help to control my blood sugar levels.

15. When I was tested for diabetes the hepatitis C wasn't discussed with me at all as far as I can remember. I have had surgery since my diagnosis and the hepatitis C has not been a problem. The only people who seem to have been concerned about the hepatitis C were dentists. I filled in a form at my dentist surgery at some point and disclosed that I had hepatitis C. Having said this, I could still get appointments as usual and I have never been refused treatment.

16. The only people who have been adamant that I couldn't participate anymore have been the blood donor service.

17. I don't feel like I have been stigmatised.

18. I do not know whether I still have hepatitis C or not. I know I have had numerous blood tests over the years but I don't know if I have ever specifically been tested for hepatitis C. I know that if you take your car to the garage and say that there's a funny noise coming from the front wheel they don't take a look at the back wheel. I suppose it is similar with medicine, most of my medical history does not relate to hepatitis C and I have never asked to be tested again.

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

19. Since my diagnosis I have not been offered any treatment, care or support. I have never received a liver biopsy or a fibroscan as far as I am aware. I have never had treatment options discussed with me, nor have I received any treatment.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

20. I have never completed a form to apply for financial assistance and have never received any money. None of the medical professionals I have seen

have mentioned the availability of financial assistance or recommended that I apply for any.

21. I do not expect any financial compensation.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

22. When I first heard about my infection at the blood donor centre in 1975 or 1976 I tried to get my medical records. I wanted to know if the infection was something that I needed to have more knowledge about. I admit that I didn't try particularly hard but I never received them. A couple of times more recently, the last time being 18 months ago, I tried again. I got in touch with the South Eastern Health Authority by phone but I couldn't get my records. I feel as though I am in a theatre and from the point I was infected the NHS have just dropped the safety curtain and not replied to my requests. When I asked the hospital to confirm the date that I had my operation, in order to discover more about my infection, I was told that they would only consider a conversation with a known haemophiliac.

23. I am concerned about the corner cutting and cost-saving in the NHS as well as the lack of transparency that comes from privatisation. I want someone to be held accountable for what happened and to ensure that the mistakes are identified and work is undertaken to ensure nothing like this happens again.

### Statement of Truth

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ **GRO-C**

Dated 21.03.19