

Witness Name: Stuart Bolitho  
Statement No.: WITN0738001  
Exhibits: Nil  
Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF STUART BOLITHO**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 12 February 2019.

I, STUART BOLITHO, will say as follows: -

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

1. My name is STUART BOLITHO. My date of birth is GRO-C1967 and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I am a married man and a father to 1 year old twins (one boy and one girl), a 3 year old daughter, a 26 year old daughter and a 24 year old son.
3. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C antibodies, which I contracted from a blood transfusion. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my life.
4. I confirm that I have decided not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me with drafting my statement.

5. It has been explained to me how my statement is to be used, and I confirm I do not wish to be anonymous.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

6. I was infected with hepatitis C antibodies from a blood transfusion in September 1991 at Southampton University Hospital.
7. When I was 4 or 5, a surgeon did an exploratory operation as my stomach was becoming distended and they wanted to discover why. He did a small bypass on part of my intestine that connected to my stomach. This bypass opened again naturally in 1991 and as a result I lost lots of blood from internal bleeding. In 1991 they operated to repair this tear and as a result I needed blood transfusions.
8. I later discovered that the hospital had had the opportunity to screen blood donations for hepatitis C in March of the same year. The alleged reason the hospital chose not to introduce the screening, was later found out to be in order to reduce the hospital's costs.
9. I discovered the contamination soon after the operation (after I had healed sufficiently). I was a blood donor, and the first time I went to donate blood afterwards, I was called by the blood transfusion service and arranged to see their doctor. He informed me that I had hepatitis C antibodies.

## **Section 3. Other infections**

10. I have not been infected with any other virus aside from the Hepatitis C antibodies.

#### **Section 4. Consent**

11. As far as I recall I was not in a position to give consent to the blood transfusions as I was very ill with internal bleeding.

#### **Section 5. Impact**

12. This contamination caused me incredible stress and anxiety. At that time my first wife was pregnant, and I was terrified that I had contaminated my daughter (I discovered later that that was impossible, but the stress was immense). Since then I have been unable to have any form of security, there is no security for my dependents and even simple things like travel insurance are too expensive to afford and there has proven to be no chance of purchasing life insurance.
13. The whole situation has affected my entire life since 1991. 28 years on and I dread the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as hepatitis C antibodies tend to have a high likelihood of causing liver cancer after 30 years in the body.
14. To make the whole situation worse, the doctor who told me of the situation in 1991 told me I must have a regular check-up annually.
15. I didn't receive my first appointment for a check-up until 5 years later. This was due to an administrative error on the part of my GP practice which meant the appointments were sent to an incorrect address. It wasn't until I raised the issue that this was put right.
16. It is hard to write down the effect this has had on my life, I genuinely believe it has had such a detrimental effect that words just can't sum up in totality.
17. The psychological complications of being infected are immense. It leaves you feeling dirty and that your life expectancy will be diminished. It makes you scared to kiss your children good night, and makes preparing for the

future of yourself and your family very difficult. It just really makes you feel as if you are just waiting to hear you have liver cancer and that is awful. No one should wake every morning and have these worries.

18. It is embarrassing to tell people you have hepatitis C, as the cause of hepatitis C is assumed to be self-inflicted. Personally, it doesn't really matter to me now, but when I was first diagnosed, I remember this doctor who assumed I was either gay or a drug user. He really made me realise how ignorant people were of the problem with contaminated blood victims.
19. I am sure this has had a terrible effect on my children when they were young. Not knowing why Dad couldn't kiss a cut better was terrible for me. I could write for hours about how looking at my children and praying they didn't catch it from me. Even worse is the thought of me dying from cancer and leaving them behind too soon.

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

20. Other than being told I had been infected and the antibodies could cause liver cancer later in life, I received virtually no additional advice or support. I was advised at the outset that I should be checked annually.
21. As previously stated, it took 5 years to get my first check-up and even since then the support I have received has been simply to ensure the antibodies haven't turned in to full blown hepatitis C. The only other advice I ever received was that I should keep my toothbrush separate from other family members. I have had no apology or any help offered with coming to terms with the situation.
22. The NHS system either wasn't there or broke down for me. They genuinely don't know how to handle people who have been contaminated. Either that or they are just so ignorant of the problem that no suitable support is available.

23. I was informed several years after my infection that I could join a group of victims in a law suit. I was then informed by the lawyers that in order to receive any compensation, I would have to prove physical problems surfacing within 5 years of the contamination. Obviously, as I only had hepatitis C antibodies, this was not going to happen. This made me extremely cross, not because of the money, but because of the lack of recognition of the serious psychological effects of being infected with hepatitis C.
24. I have never been offered counselling or psychological support in relation to my condition. I feel that some sort of counselling should have been made available at the outset to help me prepare for the future.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

25. I have received no financial assistance at all in any capacity.

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

26. I have no other issues to raise and discuss.

#### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed                     GRO-C                    

Dated           19<sup>th</sup> June 2019