Witness Name: PAUL O'HORA
Statement No: WITN1440001
Exhibits:
Dated: NOVEMBER 2018

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PAUL O'HORA

I, Paul O'Hora will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Paul O'Hora. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958 and I live at GRO-C GRO-C Northern Ireland GRO-C with my wife. My wife and I have three daughters. I am by occupation a retired Civil Servant. I retired two years ago on medical grounds.

2. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

Section 2. How infected

3. I was diagnosed with mild Haemophilia B (also known as Christmas Disease) as a child. My brothers Frank and Terry and GRO-C are also haemophiliacs.

4. I was treated at the Royal Victoria Hospital Haemophilia Centre, Belfast under the care of Dr Elizabeth Mayne throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s. I was treated with Factor IX (FIX) there as and when needed on an on demand basis on quite a few occasions. I would get into the occasional scrape during horseplay and I had the odd accidental injury. We lived in Norfolk for about a year but I did not have any treatment there at all.

5. I have been treated at Belfast City Hospital Haemophiliac Centre since the late 1980s. I was told by Dr Gary Benson that I had the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) 6 or 7 years ago. My brothers were diagnosed with HCV some time in the late 1980s/early 1990s and, as a result, suggested to me that I get tested. I felt relatively well. I was, at first, of the opinion that 'ignorance is bliss' and that there would be little point in finding out whether you have something when there was no cure for it. However Dr Benson urged me to take the test, telling me that there *is* treatment now available.

6. I have epilepsy and the medication I take has affected my memory, predominantly my short term memory but some of the historic detail surrounding the time that I was treated is a little hazy. That said, I am sure that I was infected at the Royal Victoria Hospital in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

7. When I was treated with the FIX concentration, I am certain that I was never informed at any time that there was any danger of picking up any disease from contaminated blood products. On this, I am absolutely crystal clear. I am willing to put my hand on the Bible and swear that on not one occasion was I warned of the risk. My parents and brothers were not warned of any risk.

8. When Dr Benson told me that I had tested positive, I was shocked. I had of course hoped that I didn't have HCV even though a little nagging voice in my mind would say 'you do'. Dr Benson was in my view helpful and informative about how I should manage the infection. He made sure that I realised fully that the infection would impact on the nature of my intimate/sexual contact with my wife. He explained that if I was bleeding no-one should come into any contact with me. Even a towel with blood from a small nick to my chin in

the bathroom would need to be put straight into the washing machine by me alone and boil washed as if it were radioactive. We talked about treatment. Dr Benson also provided me with a form to make a stage 1 claim for £20,000 to the Skipton Fund.

9. I remember going home in shock and having to tell my wife. It was such a difficult conversation to have and to tell her that I had the virus and also that I could pass the infection on to her through intimate/sexual contact. It was a difficult and emotional conversation to subsequently have with our daughters. It was hard for them to comprehend that if, for example, I had an accident and was on the floor bleeding and possibly dying, they could not touch me. The thought of that was unimaginable to them.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I have not been infected with anything other than HCV as a result of the FIX treatment.

Section 4. Consent

11. I have not to my knowledge been treated or tested without consent or for research purposes.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

12. The HCV diagnosis has affected my health and wellbeing. My first attempt at clearing the virus 4 or 5 years ago was unsuccessful. Dr Benson warned me it was a very difficult treatment to complete and of the nasty side effects. He called my wife and family in to the Haemophilia Centre and explained that the treatment could induce severe depression. He told them that he had had patients that had tried to end their lives on the treatment and told them to keep a sharp eye on me.

13. My brother, Frank, had lasted just one week on the very same treatment before giving up. I stuck it out. I took the Rivavirin tablets and injected myself with Interferon once a week for six months.

14. The treatment was horrific. I experienced depression, stomach cramps, nausea, loss of appetite, insomnia, and night sweats. I lost so much weight over the course of the treatment (and I am not a big person) that people would comment upon my poor appearance.

15. I had to take time two periods off from work during my treatment. Once, when the treatment became too much that I could barely leave home and the second (half way through the treatment) when I picked up an infection that knocked me off my feet. It was a terrible blow to me and my family when I learned that the treatment had not been successful and I was back to square one.

16. The second/new pill-based treatment I had just over two years ago was horrible with similar side effect but it was not quite as intense. I experienced difficulty sleeping, had severe headaches, loss of appetite and weight loss. The treatment was successful and I have cleared the virus. I was left feeling so depressed that upon the advice of my GP I reluctantly took early retirement at the age of 58. My GP sent a report to the civil service doctor as the strain had become too much. I really enjoyed my job. I would not have retired early out of choice. This has impacted upon me financially too.

17. In terms of stigma, I did not tell any of our friends and any of my work colleagues. When I had to take sick leave from work during my clearing treatment I did not explain why I was sick and made alternative excuses.

18. Out of confusion and ignorance, the first thought of others when you say you have HCV is that you are either (a) a junkie; (b) a homosexual engaging in unsafe sex or (c) an alcoholic. No-one's first thought is that this person has been given Hep C by the NHS. My brothers have experienced this stigma

and as a result we have drawn a cloak over ourselves and hidden what feels like a 'dirty family secret'. We tell no-one except our own immediate families.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

19. I have not been offered any counselling. If I had been offered counselling particularly around the time of my clearing treatment, I think it might have been useful.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

20. As stated, Dr Benson he gave me a form to make a claim to the Skipton Fund and I received £20,000. He also told me that if I develop scarring to my liver, I would be entitled to a very large sum of money. However that would in effect be what he described as "dead man walking money".

21. I receive monthly payments through what is now EIBSS. The payments are a small top up to my pension that assist with my outgoings. I was not aware that I could apply for a grant for any additional need and doubt I would have done so had I been aware. It would have felt like begging.

Section 8. Other Issues

22. Four members of my family were infected by contaminated FIX, me, my brothers and GRO-C The pain stress and health issues this has caused has been overpowering at times. To go through very painful treatment with no positive results at the end takes a toll on the entire family not just the person treated. By surviving, the O'Hara family have dodged a very big bullet. The healthcare and pain of this disaster can never be measured or understood, the families of loved ones who lost fathers, sons, mothers who have been ignored are the people my heart breaks for. I believe we owe it to every one of those families to seek justice. The dead and the dying cry out for it. It is a cry that must be heard.

23. I do not want revenge. I just want the people who have responsible to be shown what they did and the lives they destroyed. I want accountability.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

I confirm that I do not wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this Statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry. I would be willing to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **GRO-C** ....

Dated 20/12/18