

Witness Name: Christine Helen Foyer

Statement No.: WITN3594001

Exhibits: None

Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE HELEN FOYER**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 16 July 2019.

I, Christine Helen Foyer, will say as follows: -

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

1. My name is Christine Helen Foyer. My date of birth is GRO-C 1952 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am a professor at the University of Birmingham, and I have one child.
2. I intend to speak about my mother, Betty Foyer, and her infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV"). In particular, the nature of her illness, how the illness affected her, the treatment she received and the impact it had on her, our family and our lives together.
3. My sister, Clare Elizabeth Foyer, who is also providing a witness statement to the Inquiry, has assisted me with names and dates, and my memories have been aided by my mother's own diaries.

4. 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. I do not wish to remain anonymous.

## **Section 2. How Affected**

5. My mother was born on GRO-C 1929. Prior to contracting HCV, Mum worked regularly as a school dinner lady. She was married to my father Jan Bernard Foyer and they had a very happy, simple life together. My mum was a healthy person and rarely ill, except for the occasional cold.
6. My sister recalls that on 09 June 1983, my mum's skin was noticeably yellow. Although I did not know about this at the time, I can see from my mum's diaries that she attended the GP surgery in Scunthorpe Ashby, on 10 June, feeling sick and concerned about the colour of her skin. She saw Dr GRO-D who took a sample from her.
7. On the same date, in different coloured ink, Mum noted in her diary: 'I have hepatitis'. However, my mum would regularly go back to certain dates in her diary to fill in further information at a later date, so I am unsure as to when or how Mum was told about contracting hepatitis, and I do not recall her speaking about it at the time. Nevertheless, when she was told of the infection, I do not believe she was given an explanation as to how she had contracted it, how to prevent the spread of it, or even what type of hepatitis she had.
8. Mum had also recorded in her diary that on 15 June 1982, a man from the Department of Health came to see her to register her for something. Mum had noted that the visit seemed very official and it was quite scary for her. However, it is not clear why the man was there or what he wanted to register her for.

9. Mum noted that on her next visit to the GP, dated 16 June 1982, Dr GRO-D told my mum that he was very pleased with her. The comment was vague but it sounded as though Mum was doing okay.
10. Mum did not go back to work after this time and Dad took in a sick note for her. However, she was still quite active and busy around the house and socialising with friends. I was living in Sheffield during this time and seeing Mum on every Saturday. I do not remember her ever really saying that she was feeling ill and it certainly did not feel as though she had a severe illness.
11. I have been made aware from my mum's diaries that on 07 July 1982, Dr GRO-D performed an x-ray on Mum's gallbladder and on 02 August she had further x-rays and blood tests. During this time, Mum also appeared to be having problems with a polyp. On 03 August 1982, she was feeling unwell and contacted Dr GRO-D; he told her she may have to see Dr GRO-D, a Gynaecologist.
12. My Mum noted in her diary that she took a dozen capsules at 9am on 09 August. However, I am not aware of what those capsules were. The next day, she had further x-rays in Scunthorpe Hospital.
13. On 24 August 1982, Mum noted that she attended an appointment with a Dr Hayworth and had a scrape and polyp removed.
14. On 07 September 1982, Mum recorded that she had an endoscopy at Scunthorpe Hospital. As a result, Dr Wilken told her that she had to have her gallbladder removed. I do not believe that Mum was given an explanation as to why she needed her gallbladder removed.
15. I remember Mum telling me over the phone that she had to have the gallbladder operation and I was shocked. Mum was not chronically sick and as far as I knew she had just been feeling a bit unwell. At this time, I believed that Mum was having the operation due to digestive problems; I

was unaware of the hepatitis that Mum had noted in her diary in June earlier that year.

16. Prior to her gallbladder operation, my sister recalls attending an appointment with my mum to see Dr [GRO-D] on 13 September 1982. Apparently Dr [GRO-D] came into the room, examined Mum, and then turned to the nurse to say 'right then everything out, full clearance'. Dr [GRO-D] then left the room, without speaking to Mum or explaining anything. Mum seemed to think that Dr [GRO-D] was referring to her having a hysterectomy. The comment was very confusing and my sister informs me that my mum was extremely upset.
17. On 27 September 1982, Mum went into Scunthorpe Hospital to have her gallbladder operation. However, she was told that the operation could not be performed, as her blood was not clotting. Mum's diary recorded that the doctors conducted a bone marrow test, and they would see how she responded to bleeding by catching her arm. Both Dr [GRO-D] and Dr Gupta were present and took blood samples from my mum. It was not until 29 September that the operation was conducted.
18. I remember very clearly after the operation that Mum told me it was a very tricky procedure due to her blood not clotting. My mum had always had problems with her blood not clotting, and she regularly had nosebleeds, but she was never diagnosed with anything such as haemophilia. Other than this, she was an exceedingly well person and did not take any medication.
19. I was told that during the operation Mum almost died because of the amount of blood she lost. As a result, she was given two or three packs of concentrated platelets and possibly factor products to make her blood clot. Although I am aware that Mum had noted in June 1982 that she had hepatitis, I believe that it may have been the platelet transfusion and/or the use of factor products that infected Mum with HCV.

20. I remember Mum recovering well after the operation and everything was fine. Mum noted in her diary that it took her a few weeks to recover, with Dr GRO-D visiting her at home on 11 October. She went back to Scunthorpe Hospital for a check up with Dr Morgan on 06 December and had a further blood test with Dr Stewart on 23 December.
21. By January 1983 Mum seemed to be doing well. She had a small lump removed from her forehead but spoke about it quite casually. For all intensive purposes, Mum seemed to be in good health.
22. In March 1983, Mum noted in her diary that she went to the doctor for her 'first tablets'. However, I am unaware as to what these tablets were.
23. On 02 June 1983, Mum saw Dr Stewart for a blood test at Scunthorpe Hospital. In August of the same year, Mum saw a dietician and Dr GRO-D.
24. To my knowledge, Mum was well during this year, she was doing all the usual things at home, such as cleaning and washing, and she continued to be an active person. However, Mum had not returned to work and on 25 April 1994 she informed them of her early retirement.
25. On 24 May 1984, Mum went for a liver function test with Dr Stewart.
26. At the end of June, Mum was feeling very unwell again. She went to see Dr GRO-D who gave her water tablets for what I believe was a build up of fluid in her liver. She had check ups in October of that year and further blood tests.
27. On 31 November 1984, Mum recorded in her diary that she went to see Dr Lieicch regarding her liver, and on 03 December Dr Lieicch told Mum that she has to have further tests. X-rays, an endoscopy and blood tests were then carried out the following January.

28. On 21 January 1985, Mum was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver. The diagnosis felt unbelievable. No one explained where it came from or the severity of it. I did not realise that it was a life-threatening diagnosis. I could not get my head round the fact that my Mum had it, she had no tattoos or piercings, she did not have multiple partners, use drugs or drink alcohol; she led a very simple catholic life with my dad. It was bizarre that she could possibly have cirrhosis but I had no idea of the severity and I thought she could still live a relatively normal life.
29. This was the first time I had heard about my mum's hepatitis infection. Although Clare believes that she knew in June 1982, as far as I was aware, Mum's hepatitis diagnosis came with her cirrhosis diagnosis. The level of information Mum received for both of these diagnoses was so rudimentary that she did not even discuss it with my father, with whom she shared everything. We were only told that the cirrhosis was of unknown origin and received no further information at this time.
30. Afterwards, we had a period of time where, as far as I remember, Mum was reasonably well; we went for days out and did stuff together, she very rarely complained about being ill.
31. The next time I knew anything was wrong with Mum was when I was told that she would be having a hysterectomy in June 1985. I did not really understand why she was having the hysterectomy but at the time a lot of women underwent the procedure. My sister and I were later told in 1990, that the hysterectomy was a precautionary measure for a polyp, which could have been benign or malignant.
32. To my knowledge, the hysterectomy was successful and, unlike with her gallbladder surgery, Mum had no problems with her blood clotting; she recovered well after.
33. During the following years, Mum was reasonably well. She had the odd bout of nausea but continued her normal activities, such as: washing,

cleaning, going to the market and looking after my daughter. I used to see her quite regularly until I moved to France in 1988 and I continued to speak to her weekly and travel over to see her around three times a year after the move.

34. In the year prior to Mum's death, she had periods of going yellow and would become very sick. I was aware that she had been in hospital at least twice, as she would write me letters from there, talking about the other patients in the ward. I had no idea why she was in there other than for the doctors to keep an eye on her. As far as I knew, they never told my mum that her health was deteriorating.
35. Mum was not chronically ill all day everyday, on many days she was fine. She would still come to visit my daughter and me in France and we would explore Paris together. She was not an ill woman from that point of view.
36. The Easter before Mum died, we met up in London with my sister and daughter. She appeared to be fine over Easter but when I spoke to her shortly after she told me that she did not feel well enough to look after my daughter and was exceptionally tired. Mum used to love looking after my daughter so I knew that she must have been feeling very unwell.
37. Mum had made several attempts to contact Dr [GRO-D] but he barely responded. My mum had a high pain threshold and put up with a great deal, she was not a person who complained easily.
38. When Mum went to the doctor's surgery to see Dr [GRO-D], he sent her away with no treatment and was simply told to just stay at home in bed. I believe now that he probably knew she was in the latter stages of cirrhosis and breakdown of the liver but he did nothing to help her. In my opinion, Dr [GRO-D] was completely negligent.

39. Mum had also gone back to Scunthorpe Hospital two or three times in the months before she died and had tests performed, so I believe that the doctors at the hospital must have also known about her deteriorating health and again not informed us.
40. One evening, Dad phoned my sister and I to tell us that Mum had been walking round the house in a coma-like state, unaware of where or who she was. He had called the ambulance and rushed her into Scunthorpe Hospital. By the time I got back in England and to the hospital, Mum was in a coma. Prior to this episode, I was told that she had not been sleeping, she felt sick and unwell in her stomach; she was very debilitated and tired.
41. Scunthorpe Hospital transferred Mum to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, which was a specialist liver hospital. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital diagnosed Mum with bile duct cancer, caused by the cirrhosis, and inserted a stent to try and relieve Mum of some pain. Mum recovered consciousness and stayed in the Birmingham hospital for a couple of weeks. I remember her being reasonably good after the stent had been inserted. However, the stent moved after a couple of weeks and the hospital told us there was nothing more that they could do, Mum was dying.
42. I remember the doctor in Birmingham mentioning Mum had HCV whilst she an in-patient there. Other than the vague mention of hepatitis when Mum was diagnosed with cirrhosis, this was the first time I remember hearing Mum had contracted specifically HCV. I was in no state to ask questions at the time, but my sister asked the doctor whether the transfusion my mum received in September 1982 could have caused her HCV, cirrhosis or cancer. Clare said the doctor informed her that the chances of the transfusion being infected were highly unlikely and re-affirmed that the cirrhosis was of unknown origin.



43. Our family found out more at the Birmingham hospital than we had ever done at Scunthorpe regarding my mum's health. I was unaware that the liver specialist hospital even existed before we walked in there. I believe that she should have been sent there much earlier and a stent could have been put in long before.
44. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital transferred Mum back to Scunthorpe for palliative care in the last couple of days of her life. I sat with Mum most of the time in the hospital and I hardly saw any nurse or doctor come to care for her; they just left her to die. Mum was in a dreadful state during this time, and I had to sit there and watch whilst Scunthorpe Hospital did nothing for her. She was in a coma, but clearly distressed and in pain, she was shaking, moving her arms and shouting out, as though she was hallucinating.
45. Mum died in July 1990. No one at Scunthorpe Hospital came to speak to my father or I afterwards. My mum's death certificate noted both cirrhosis and liver failure as the cause of her death, and I believe that these were a result of the hepatitis infection, but no one ever actually explained to us why Mum died. I assumed until recently that it was the cancer that caused her death.

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

46. Given the lack of information provided to Mum and our family, I am unaware if she was infected with any infection other than HCV.

### **Section 4. Consent**

47. I do not believe that my mother was treated or tested without her knowledge or consent. However, I do believe that she was treated and tested without being given adequate or full information. Therefore her consent was limited as she was provided with no information, for

example Mum agreed to blood tests but did not know what they were testing for.

48. My mum was given hardly any information or advice in regards to her health, throughout her multiple diagnoses of hepatitis, cirrhosis and bile duct cancer, she never received any sort of paperwork from the hospitals or any letters from her GP, even Mum's appointments were booked in person. The lack of paperwork around Mum's diagnoses, operations and tests is a big reason as to why we know so little about what happened to her.
49. To my knowledge, there was never any information given to Mum regarding the risk of transmission and as a result my sister, young daughter and I, would freely cook in the kitchen together and do Mum's hair. We did not know how infectious hepatitis was and therefore we took no precautionary measures. Had Mum been given advice to be careful in certain situations she would have been, but there were no clear, kind or helpful explanations provided to her at all.
50. If Mum had received any written or verbal information regarding HCV or cirrhosis she would have shared it with us, she was a very open and honest person and we regularly discussed her health. Mum wanted to know as much as possible and she was not someone people felt like they had to hide the truth from in order to protect.
51. Mum had a huge amount of confidence in medical professionals and therefore she did not ask questions or challenge explanations, but as a result she was given very little information. It was as though the onus was on Mum to ask the questions rather than on the doctors to provide explanations.
52. I do not believe Mum was treated or tested for the purposes of research.

## Section 5. Impact

53. For Mum, the cirrhosis was a nagging worry in the back of her mind that she tried to keep away. When I was little, my Grandmother had cancer and my Mum became petrified of getting it. When Mum was diagnosed with cirrhosis, she wasn't as scared because no one told her the severity of the illness. There was still a nagging worry that she was ill but she would have long spells of wellness before becoming ill again. I think it affected her quality of life, as although she was not constantly ill, she was often tired or have bouts of sickness. Going for the operations really scarred her and the way she was treated by the medical profession upset her. She was only 61 years old when she died.
54. Mum's early retirement, in April 1984, had a strong financial impact on both Mum and Dad. Mum hadn't worked since June 1982 due to her on-going health problems, so both my parents lived on Dad's pension. If Mum could have continued to work to help support them both she would have. Mum also really liked her job, her work provided much of her social life, and kept her fit, but both of these enjoyments were curtailed by her illness.
55. In our everyday lives, when she wasn't ill, Mum was happy, and as a family of four we were as positive as we could be until the end. Although we kept hoping that she would get better, the knowledge that Mum was ill did hugely impact our family life.
56. I think Dad struggled to understand the severity of Mum's illness and he was bereft by her loss. He was 12 years older than my mum and he always believed he would be the one to go first. She was really his only friend and did almost everything for him. Dad was a man who went out to work and came home. Mum cooked his meals, cleaned the house, did the washing and more; he was at a total loss when she died. They shared everything together and although he tried his best without her, he struggled everyday. I came back to live in the UK after Mum passed to

look after him more and I would go visit him every couple of weeks to help him like my mum did as much as possible.

57. My sister's relationship with my dad fractured in a way that it would not have done had my mum stayed alive. Dad did not talk to us about his grief, and the inability to discuss Mum's death angered both my sister and I. We were grieving and angry at losing Mum, not him; we knew he loved my mum.
58. Dad got Alzheimer's a few years after Mum passed away, and I think he went downhill quicker than if my mum had been there to help and support him. Although this was my father's illness, Mum not being there to support him impacted him and that impact then rippled to us.
59. My mum's death impacted all of the family hugely. She was just our mum and our mum who did everything for us. After Mum died, I changed my job to move back to the UK to look after my Dad. I would never have thought about leaving my job in France in any other situation, it was a well-paid job and I enjoyed it, but I felt I had to come home to help to look after my dad.
60. Mum had not been secretive about her illness, she openly discussed it with friends and I do not believe she felt any sort of stigma. However, I felt it became more socially difficult to talk about Mum's death once people started to realise what HCV was. I would tell people that my mum died of cancer not HCV to avoid talking about the things associated with it.

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

61. To my knowledge, Mum did not have any treatment for the HCV or cirrhosis. I think she would have told us if she was on tablets and she definitely did not have injections.

62. The only medication I was aware that Mum was on were water tablets because she was swelling up.
63. As Mum received no advice or information regarding her hepatitis infection, she was not aware that she should tell dentists and other doctors about her condition. If she had been told to inform others and be cautious, she would have been. As it happened, she was not told, therefore she did not face any difficulties or obstacles in obtaining non-hepatitis related treatment, such as dentistry care.
64. I do not believe any counselling or psychological support was offered to Mum or any of the family, and it was definitely not offered to me.
65. I think as a family we could have all done with some sort of counselling or psychological support. We had a level of not knowing what had happened and why, it was not just the grief we did not know how to deal with but we just did not know why it had all happened and all so fast. In particular, I was very upset with Scunthorpe Hospital. I felt the doctors had no care for Mum or us and I would have liked to have somebody to talked to. I felt my mum was allowed to die and someone to talk to about that would have helped.
66. I particularly think counselling would have helped my sister and her guilt. Clare had arranged not to come home the Christmas before Mum died, and she struggles even today with the guilt she feels over that. My dad could have also done with someone to talk to. He needed advice on how to get through his days, basic things like how to use the Hoover, cook and buy the right food.
67. I can confirm that the Inquiry team have made me aware of the psychological support that the British Red Cross can offer my family and myself; I have received their contact details from the Inquiry Team and I will consider getting in touch for their services.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

68. I was unaware of any financial assistance that my family or I could have received from the Trusts and Funds schemes. My sister and I were always so confused by Mum's illness that it never even crossed our minds.
69. Had we of received financial assistance it would have helped massively, particularly with my dad in the years after Mum's death. Dad had to re-mortgage the house to fund care for his Alzheimer's. If we had received financial assistance we could have got him some help around the house and additional care for his illness.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

70. In terms of my expectations from the Inquiry, I would like a level of clarity as to what happened to my mum and why. I believe this may be achieved by attaining Mum's medical records from Scunthorpe Hospital and my sister and I are seeking to do this imminently. If we find out Scunthorpe Hospital was at fault for Mum's infection and resulting illnesses then at least we will know what happened. It is the not knowing that I find terrible.
71. If Mum's death is proven to be the result of contaminated blood this should never be allowed to happen again. I would not want anyone else to see a loved one have to go through what my family and I have had to.
72. I believe that there should be a level of care right from the beginning for patients and if a mistake is made then they should be given the best standard of care possible to try and rectify it.
73. I think there should be genuine efforts to follow up the people who have been affected and infected by contaminated blood to help and support

them. A level of support like this would have really helped my family and I after my Mum passed away.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

09/09/2019