Witness Name: Victor Beauvois
Statement No: **WITN44220001**
Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 27 November 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF VICTOR BEAUVOIS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 November 2020.

I, Victor Beauvois, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Victor Beauvois. My date of birth is GRO-C 1946 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I live with my wife Jan and we have been married for 48 years. We have 4 children, 7 grandchildren and a great grandchild.

2. I retired at the age of 54 from the Kensington and Chelsea and Borough Council, as a result of ill health, associated with Hepatitis C (HCV).

3. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which I believe I contracted as a result of being given a blood transfusion.

4. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment that I received and the impact it had on my life.

5. I should point out that I have never kept records regarding any aspects of my HCV and so I rely on memory in terms of dates and years which is not very precise.

6. 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

7. Around the age of 19 or 20 years old, I suffered with severe chest pain coming home from work and I collapsed. An ambulance was called and I was taken to the Royal Brompton Hospital. I was diagnosed with a pneumothorax – a collapsed lung. I was kept in hospital for a few weeks whilst the pneumothorax resolved.

8. A couple of months afterwards the same thing happened again, but this time the pneumothorax was more severe. I had an emergency operation to repair the collapsed lung and my surgeon was Dr Magdi Yacoub. He later became a renowned heart surgeon at Harefield Hospital, for which he was knighted.

9. After the operation, I distinctly remember being attached to blood and plasma. There was a stand next to my bed with a red and a yellow bag. I also had a tube in my left side, which was a blood drain to remove excess blood from my chest. No medical professional ever informed me that I received a blood transfusion.

10. I was kept in hospital for a few weeks before I was discharged and I was off work for a total of 5 or 6 weeks. At the time I worked for Claude Gill Books in Oxford Street, where among my duties, I delivered books to different embassies. One of the security staff at the Japanese Embassy offered me a job there when I was 21, which I accepted.

11. I later worked for a freight company in Wardour Street, which involved visiting bonded warehouses. I got married at the age of 27 and everything in terms of my health was fine. Our daughter Natasha was born, followed by our son Luke and then our twins. Jake and Yelena. At this time, I was established at work for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. I always worked the early shift from 6am till 2pm.

12. I went through years of feeling very tired and fatigued and did not know why. I later noticed that my blood pressure was going up, so I booked an appointment with

my GP, Dr Mitchell at his surgery in Denby Street Pimilco, which is no longer there. He referred me to the hospital, where tests were taken.

13. When the results came back, the cardiologist asked if I was expecting any bad news, to which I replied no, but I thought something must have been picked up for me to be asked this. She said 'I am sorry to tell you that you have hepatitis' and I was referred to the hepatology department at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, where further tests were taken. I was later diagnosed with HCV genotype 1A – the hardest to treat. I do not know exactly when I was diagnosed, my memory on this is very poor and I have nothing else to refer to. However, I know it was before I retired, which was after the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001 but before the London tube bombings in 2005 – some 30-40 years after my receiving infected blood.

14. I presumed that HCV was a blood infection, but I had not heard of it at all. I thought I must have contracted the virus from a cut or from another person – although it was very unlikely that I would have received it sexually. It was unbeknown to me at the time that I could have received contaminated blood.

15. I was told there was no cure for HCV, but that I would be kept on surveillance. At this stage I was not drinking alcohol because of the way I had been feeling, but in the hepatology department I was surrounded by people that had dodgy lifestyles. That said, although I was treated alongside alcoholics and drug addicts, it did not really bother me.

16. My wife was tested for HCV not long after my diagnosis, but this returned negative. My children have never been tested.

17. I was told ahead of my second course of treatment to be careful if I had a cut and I was to use separate towels, tooth brush and cutlery to my wife and children. This was the only infection control that I was informed about.

Section 3. Other Infections

18. I have not contracted any infection other than HCV as a result of being given contaminated blood.

Section 4. Consent

19. I have no reason to believe that I was treated or tested without my consent.

Section 5. Impact

20. A couple of years after I was diagnosed with HCV, I was offered a 48-week course of treatment. This took place in 2011 and consisted of Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. I took the Ribavirin tablets daily and self-administered the Interferon injections every Thursday. I was shown how to administer the injections at the hospital, using an orange to practice. Initially, I chose my leg to be the site of injection because I was not brave enough to inject into my stomach.

21. During the treatment, I went to the hospital every Wednesday for my blood levels to be checked. If my blood level was too low, I would not be able to administer the injection the following day. My viral load was also monitored over the 48 weeks.

22. I did not like self-injecting the Interferon, but I had no choice. It made me feel every nauseous and I would feel bad within a few hours of administering the injection. I would take myself off to the spare room and would be wiped out for a few days.

23. I lost body hair as a result of the treatment and I lost some weight. I became very angry and uncharacteristically short tempered – I would overreact to anything trivial.

24. A couple of weeks after finishing the treatment, I was told that it had been unsuccessful and there had been no change to my viral load. I was also informed that I could not have any further treatment for a year.

25. I started a second 48 week course of treatment in 2012. This consisted of Telaprevir in addition to Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. I took the Telaprevir and Ribavirin tablets daily and I was told to eat something fatty with the Telaprevir. I chose to eat full fat Greek yoghurt and chopped fruit. I administered the injections every Thursday, as I did for my first course of treatment.

26. The side effects were very similar to the first course of treatment and I was told to stop taking the medication at 48 weeks. A week or so later, I had a blood test and I was again told that the treatment had been unsuccessful.

27. Finally, I was successfully treated in 2016 following a 12-week trial of Harvoni. I was informed only a few individuals were put forward for this treatment. I used to meet with different pharmaceutical companies to talk with them about my experience with HCV and I would be paid £50 in expenses. I was referred onto this by the hospital and I think the Harvoni trial was a result of this.

28. The medication was provided by the hospital and I was regularly monitored at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. After finishing the treatment, further tests were taken and I was told a few weeks later that my viral load was undetectable. I initially went back every 3 months for a blood test, but the regularity has now been reduced and I attend every 6 months.

29. I have suffered with 'brain fog' as a result of the virus and I cannot remember dates very well. I became quite forgetful whilst on the treatment and worried that I had early onset of dementia.

30. At the time of my first course of treatment, a liver biopsy was taken. I had to lay on my side and a needle was fired into my liver. It was very uncomfortable and painful.

31. In 2012 I was diagnosed with non-alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver. I recall asking the doctor how long I have left, to which he replied 'how long is a piece of string'. I am regularly monitored and an ultrasound of my liver is taken every three months. I was on the liver transplant list, but I am unaware if I still am – I have never been told that there is a liver ready for me. I now have end stage cirrhosis and it is constant worry and concern that my liver could pack up and fail at any time. I am aware that it is a very painful death. I have been informed that my liver cirrhosis may lead to cancer and I am currently under cancer surveillance.

32. There was a period when I suffered with severe nose bleeds and I thought my liver was packing up. I was seen at Charing Cross Hospital and assured that was not the case.

33. Sometime between my second and third course of treatment, I had an operation to remove gallstones at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. It was recommended for the gallstones to be removed in case I had a liver transplant. A few weeks after the operation, I suffered with ascites (a build-up of fluid in the abdomen). I was taken by ambulance back to the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital to be drained. My son came accompanying me in the ambulance and he was told I had a 50/50 chance of survival. I was put under local anaesthetic for the fluid to be drained and I was told it was to do with the cirrhosis. A stoma bag was put on my front and on my side, to drain off the fluid.

34. I developed a hernia after my gallstone operation, but the surgeon has advised against operating on the hernia – there is a threat that my liver could be nicked and that would be life threatening. He also asked if I had any grandchildren, to which I said yes and he explained if they knocked into me it could affect the post op recovery. I was not upset when the operation was refused because I trusted what the consultant said about the risk to my liver.

35. After I was diagnosed with HCV, I had trouble with receiving dental treatment. I rang up a couple of dental surgeries in the area and explained how I contracted HCV, but they refused to provide any treatment. One of the surgeries was in Denby Place, Pimlico but again that will no longer be there. I have not had a dentist since 2009, despite successfully clearing the virus in 2016 and I have suffered as a result – I have a number of teeth missing due to tooth decay.

36. I have never been refused treatment for any other medical condition as a result of my HCV infection.

37. The virus had no effect on my married life and my wife has been supportive all the way through my ill health. Nevertheless, I was very careful around cross contamination, especially with my children. My wife also cut my hair, to reduce the risk of transmission.

38. I do not think my grandchildren are aware of my HCV infection. Some of them are still very young and I would like to be around to see them grow up. It is a concern that I could go early and miss out on their childhoods. They would also be deprived of a grandfather at a very young age.

39. I told a few close friends that I had been infected with HCV, but I did not tell many people because of the stigma associated with the virus.

40. I do recall seeing a yellow sticker on my medical file for some time with the words 'blood borne disease', yet it has since been removed.

41. I had to retire early because of ill health related to HCV. My intention was to work up until retirement age and I now have a reduced pension as a result of being deprived 10-11 years of pensionable service. My pension is 30-40% lower than what I would have received, had I of worked until the age of 65.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

42. I have never been offered counselling in relation to my HCV infection, but I doubt I would have accepted it in any case.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

43. I applied to the Skipton Fund on the recommendation of Dr Mike Anderson, my hepatologist at Chelsea & Westminster. I cannot recall what year I applied.

44. I do not remember hearing anything after submitting the application and I never followed it up – I thought I would be dead from cirrhosis before anything happened and so I thought it was not worth the hassle.

Section 8. Other Issues

45. I donated blood a couple of times after my operation in the mid 1960s and before I was diagnosed with HCV. Unbeknown to me, I have probably donated infected blood. This does not sit well with me, because I donated blood out of good intentions and had no idea I was infected with HCV. I used to trust medical professionals and take their advice on faith and I still do though it has been shaken by this experience and my infection with HCV.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 27th November 2020.