Witness Name: Leonard Victor Purkhardt
Statement No.: WITN4985001
Exhibits: **Nil**
Dated: 27 May 2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF LEONARD VICTOR PURKHARDT

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 May 2021.

I, Leonard Victor Purkhardt, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Leonard Victor Purkhardt. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958 and my address is GRO-C.

2. I am retired, having worked as both a joiner and business owner of clothing factories on and off for over 30 years. I live with my partner and we have been together for over 40 years. I have one grown-up child from my previous marriage and two grown-up children with my current partner. My partner and I are also registered guardians of my great nephew, aged 11, who lives with us. My great nephew is the grandson

of my late brother Henry who died of liver failure and had HCV. GRO-C GRO-C

3. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C ('HCV'). In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me, my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

4. In 1962, when I was aged 3 or 4. I was very young and have no personal memory of the event but my sister has since explained to me what happened. I went with my sister after school to an allotment my family owned near to our home. We used to go there regularly after school to feed the chickens and plant vegetables etc. On this occasion I was walking on a cold frame, which is effectively a low level greenhouse style glass cabinet that sits over plants.

5. Whilst walking over this 'structure' my foot went through a pane of glass. My right leg was cut open at the back, near the top. My sister, who is 4 or 5 years older than me, witnessed the incident and remembers that I lost a lot of blood. She described seeing blood spurting out everywhere from my leg. I apparently lost a lot of blood.

6. I have no idea how the alarm was raised or how long it took to get first aid or any medical attention but I do know that I was taken to Oldham Royal Hospital, which is no longer there, by ambulance. My Mum, who attended the hospital with me, remembers being told by the medics that I needed a blood transfusion. I have a massive scar that began at the back of my leg but has grown unusually to the bottom of my back. I just suppose that it 'moved' as I grew over the years. I don't know how long I was in hospital and anything that I say about this incident was what was relayed to me by my mother and sister.

7. After this, my childhood was rather subdued. I was quiet and withdrawn, which has all led to the depression that I seemed to have lived with ever since. My general health was fine except for some ear, nose and throat problems. However, I was always the first of my six siblings to go to bed, and the last to get up. My siblings were much more active than I was. I was called lazy and this made me feel different to everybody else, including kids of my age outside my family.

8. When I was aged 11 or 12 I lacked energy and motivation. I began to feel depressed and I could not see the point of life, I still can't. I struggled to concentrate and this made things difficult at school.

9. I left school aged 16 and began an apprenticeship as a joiner. I was indentured, meaning I was not paid, or at least not paid properly whilst I was undergoing training. I worked as a shop fitter and bar fitter for a number of years. Over this time, I continued to feel fatigued and lacking in energy.

10. At age 35 I started a clothing manufacturing business with my brothers. I acted as director of the company and employed around 50 people in a factory in Royton, Manchester. My interest in clothing and textiles was influenced by my parents who had worked in associated trades, having settled in the North West from Poland.

11. In 1980 this business began to die out and I started back up again in 1995. I let it trickle through my fingers as I couldn't cope with the stress. My mental health was a constant problem and I simply couldn't deal with it.

12. Over this period, I regularly sought medical assistance for my depression but I never received any help. I was told to "pull my socks up" and to just "get on with it" and told that "we all have sad days". The general fatigue I experienced was a killer, and was destroying my life.

13. Around 2004 my brother, Henry, died of liver failure. At a post mortem it was identified that Henry had HCV and this had caused his death. This

had not been diagnosed and his liver problems were put down to his drinking and other lifestyle choices. I was deeply affected by my brother's death, which only went to make my mental health worse. Although we fought a lot, it was only really sibling rivalry. We were actually very close.

14. I believe that as a consequence of Henry's death, I was called to the GP where I was told that I should have a test for HCV. We both had the same GP, Dr Buckley, a female doctor at Hopwood House, Leeds Road. I think that she had put two and two together and concluded that I may also have HCV, given the issues that I had complained of.

15. I had a HCV test and a week or so later I received a call from my GP telling me that I was HCV positive. Dr Buckley said that this could be a false positive so I had another test that confirmed I was HCV positive. Dr Buckley initially put my HCV down to drinking, but I have never been a big drinker.

16. After being told of my diagnosis, and having seen my brother's demise, I thought I was going to die. The business at the time was too much for me and I began to drink small amounts, maybe one or two cans every evening, to deal with the stress. I decided to give the business to administrators to shut down. At the time the business was viable and we had £300,000 in the business bank account. However, I ended up having to give away half of my house and I believe that I was completely ripped off.

17. Dr Buckley referred me to a specialist at the infectious diseases department at Manchester Royal Infirmary. I was seen by Dr Vilar, who looked after me throughout and has been fantastic. Dr Vilar gave me leaflets and informed me about HCV. As I had lived with my partner for over 30 years and she had tested negative, I didn't pay much attention and didn't believe that it was as infectious as they made out.

18. Dr Vilar told me that my viral load was much higher than Henry's had been, and that we had the same genotype. He said that this genotype

was very rare and was from the Middle East. Dr Vilar therefore concluded that I must have given it to Henry. We often used to fight as kids and then as young adults and it was entirely possible that I could have transmitted it to him via blood.

19. Dr Vilar also told me that my viral load indicated that HCV had been in my body for 35 to 40 years. He asked me about any intravenous drug use, promiscuity or tattoos, to which I replied that none of those could be the cause. I thought this was a bit of a strange question, because if it had been in my system for that long, I would have been a child when I first contracted HCV.

20. Around 12 months or so after my diagnosis I spoke to my sister and she said that I had a blood transfusion after the accident with my leg. I also asked my late mother around this time and she specifically said that she was told by the medics at Oldham Royal Hospital that I needed a blood transfusion after the accident in 1962.

21. At the time of my diagnosis there was no treatment immediately available. I had to wait around 2 years before I was offered a 12 month course of interferon and ribavirin treatment. I injected the interferon once a week, on a Thursday, and took ribavirin tablets daily. The interferon injections made me feel awful and nauseous. I was sick every morning after breakfast and I felt generally unwell, though I would say that it was not as bad as flu.

22. During the course of this treatment I went to the Manchester Royal Infirmary initially every week for tests, then every fortnight after the first few months. My viral load was showing signs of reducing but they discovered that I had a low white blood cell count. As a result, it was decided to stop the treatment after 6 months with the HCV not cleared.

23. Around 2 to 3 years later I was offered a second course of interferon and ribavirin treatment. I believe that the MRI gave it 2 years or so to allow my white blood cells to build back up again before restarting treatment.

The side-effects were much the same as before in that it made me feel sick and unwell. I noticed that the pain in my liver had stopped so I thought it must be working.

24. Despite this, I still felt that the cure was worse than the disease, which only went to make me feel even more depressed. I completed the 6 month course of treatment but it was unsuccessful. Around a month afterwards I went back to see my GP complaining of pain in my liver and feeling generally unwell and depressed.

25. I began a third course of treatment around 2014/15. This was offered to me as a trial treatment and I was unsure whether to take up the offer. I still felt that the treatment was worse than the infection. This trial treatment involved taken a tablet daily for 6 or 12 months. I was not told what the medication was called but I was probably told at the end but I cannot now recall the name.

26. During this trial, I attended Manchester Royal Infirmary weekly, followed by a clinic in Oldham. The treatment was still making me vomit and feel ill but my viral load was decreasing. I completed the course of treatment and was told that the HCV was undetectable at the end.

27. After clearing HCV in 2015, my health didn't noticeably improve. I felt much the same as before except the pain in my liver had stopped. I have been waiting for a miracle change in my health for all of my life but it has never come. I was told that I have scarring of the liver but my liver function is fine as far as I am aware.

Section 3. Other Infections

28. I did not receive any other infections as a result of contaminated blood.

Section 4. Consent

29. To the best of my knowledge I was not treated or tested without my consent.

Section 5. Impact

30. My HCV infection has had a profound impact on my life. I have always felt different to my siblings and peers, feeling tired and depressed for most of my life. I still feel the same now even though I have cleared HCV. I believe the damage has been done. Life has always been a struggle and I can't see the point in life. I wake up and feel unwell and I have felt like this for as long as I can remember.

31. I still sleep a lot even now. I sleep during the day in a chair because if I go to bed I won't get back up. I usually sleep for around 14 hours every night, waking up at around midday. My partner gets angry at me about this but I cannot help it.

32. GRO-C the relationship with my partner has suffered enormously. GRO-C GRO-C Soon after my diagnosis, my partner attended a medical assessment with a doctor at the benefits office where she was told that I must have been sleeping around to have contracted HCV. Although this was completely untrue she believed it and our relationship has suffered as a result. GRO-C GRO-C

33. I believe that I infected my brother with HCV as a result of fighting when we were both young adults. My brother was a bully to me when I was younger and I eventually stood up to him. This resulted in pretty bad fights and there was blood spilt. I attribute my brothers HCV to these fights, for which I feel guilty. Dr Vilar implied that I had transmitted the infection to Henry as we both had the same rare HCV genotype.

34. I have only ever told people about my HCV when I have had to. There is a stigma associated with HCV and I have always tried to keep it within my close family. Whenever I have told medical professionals they have mainly been pretty good and understanding.

35. In my late 20s and early 30s I was really struggling with depression and fatigue. I was working in London at the time as a shop fitter. I recall going to the doctors and telling them that I was depressed but I did not receive any help. One day a colleague offered me some amphetamines so I tried it. I used to snort it or put it in my mouth.

36. The effect of the amphetamines made me stay awake and feel alert. I felt like I had more energy, and had the same motivation as other people. After this I began to self-medicate with amphetamine to prevent depression and to keep me awake. I became reliant on it GRO-C

GRO-C

37. GRO-C

GRO-C The medics GRO-C were helpful and I began speaking to psychologists. Being able to talk was helpful and this was the first time I ever received help for my mental health.

38. I used to be a fit and healthy man, but when I got to age 35 my life started to fall apart. I always felt there was something wrong with me. I was always tired and being called 'lazy' had an adverse effect on my mental health.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

39. I have faced difficulties in accessing dental treatment. When I told my dentist that I had HCV they sought to get rid of me. They said they were cutting down on the number of patients and that they could no longer treat me. This happened on two occasions, first at Apple Dentist on Ashton Road, Oldham and then at the 'My Dentist' practice on Beal Lane in Shaw, Oldham. Once they knew I had HCV they effectively forced me out of the practice.

40. I received psychological support GRO-C but have not been offered any form of counselling or psychological support by my GP, the hospitals or the NHS more generally. I believe this should have been offered to me in light of my mental health difficulties and I feel that it would have been helpful to me.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

41. Dr Vilar of Manchester Royal Infirmary told me about the Skipton Fund soon after my diagnosis. I applied first in December 2006. Around this time I also applied for my medical records but I was told they had been destroyed in the 1980s. My application was returned to me due to a lack of supporting evidence and because the Skipton Fund needed further evidence from my doctor.

42. I reapplied to the Skipton Fund in 2011 and was again unable to provide any medical records. This second application was also rejected due to a lack of evidence showing that I received a blood transfusion. I have been unable to evidence this because my medical records from 1962 were destroyed.

Section 8. Other Issues

43. I donated blood on 3 or 4 occasions around 1981. GRO-C GRO-C I decided I would donate as well and did so over roughly a 2 year period. I now realise that in all likelihood I will have passed on infected blood. It is horrible to think that I may have put someone else through what I have been through. Although the doctor said I can't think that way, it doesn't make me feel any better and this has only gone added to my depression.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 27/5/21