

Witness Name: Christine Susan Coombs

Statement No: WITN3886001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: December 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE SUSAN COOMBS

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I, Christine Susan Coombs will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Christine Susan Coombs. I was born on the GRO-C 1948 and I live at GRO-C. I am currently retired. I am married with two children, a daughter aged 47 and a son aged 52, and I have one grandchild.
2. I make this statement in relation to my late father, Cyril Walter Thomas Pooley, who was born on the GRO-C 1922 and passed away on the 24 July 1980, aged 58 as a result of receiving contaminated blood products. I believe he was infected with Hepatitis B (Hep B), Non A, Non B Hepatitis (NANB) and possibly HIV.
3. My brother, Terence Pooley, also provided a witness statement to the Inquiry ('WITN3406001'). Terrence was not living at home when my father first started getting poorly so I have a better memory of that time.
4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late father's 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 Affected**

5. I note from my brother's witness statement that he stated at paragraph 5 that my father received a blood transfusion after being involved in a Road Traffic Accident and that he also had a problem some years earlier and was Kent and Canterbury Hospital (KCH) and he may have also received a blood transfusion then. I am able to give a more accurate account as to what happened to my father as I lived closer to my parents than my brother, Terrence did and therefore know the events as to when my father received contaminated blood products.
6. In the mid 1970s, possibly 1976 or 1977, after an evening out my father was feeling unwell and during the night he got worse. By the morning he was taken to KCH and diagnosed with a stomach bleed, where he was given a blood transfusion. He remained in hospital for a couple of weeks after that transfusion. This was the first time that I believe my father received a blood transfusion. As stated above, my father was involved in a Road Traffic Accident, which occurred after the incident with the stomach bleed. I do not recall if he had a blood transfusion for this incident.
7. My father was not told by the hospital medical staff of any potential risk and consequence involved in a blood transfusion, he just thought he was receiving treatment to get him better.
8. As a result of the blood transfusion, my father was infected with Hep B, NANB and possibly HIV.
9. My father must have been told something about the above infections because my father told my husband that he was 'very sick inside'. I believe he was told at some point that he had some form of hepatitis. When we saw his death certificate the cause of death was stated as 'chronic hepatitis' This was the first time that I knew about hepatitis. I don't know what form of hepatitis it was.
10. I do not believe that my father was given any adequate information to help him understand and manage the infections. I believe that my father should

have received more information about the infections. It would have helped both my father and mother as my mother became my father's full-time carer.

11. I believe that information should have been provided earlier so both my parents would have had a better understanding of the infection/s.

12. I don't believe my father was informed about the risk of transmitting the infection. As far as I am aware, my mother was never tested for hepatitis.

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

13. I do not know if my father received any other infections. When my father died we did not know about HIV or AIDS. So, when it came out in the early 1980s we all thought that was what my father had died of. We thought all the symptoms added up to what he had. We put two and two together knowing he had received a blood transfusion. So there is a possibility he may have also been infected with HIV.

### **Section 4. Consent**

14. I don't know if my father was tested without his knowledge.

15. I believe my father was treated and tested without being given adequate information. I don't think he had any information because he would have told us, especially my mother.

16. I don't know if he was treated or tested for the purposes of research.

### **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

17. I am the eldest daughter of 10 children. My father was a fit, strong, healthy, active man, who loved ball sports and sporting events.

18. My father seemed okay when he finally left the hospital after the stomach bleed. He went back to work and carried on with his normal active life. However, it wasn't long before he started feeling tired and fatigued. He tried to carry on with his normal life but he started losing weight rapidly. We all began

to worry that something more sinister was wrong with him. He wasn't the same person anymore. He lost his appetite, his hair became very thin and white (he had thick red hair that he was very proud of). He had no bladder control and therefore found it embarrassing to go out. As a family we had no idea what was going on with him.

19. My father was taken back to KCH for tests, he was moved from the main ward to a small side room on his own. From then on his health deteriorated rapidly. He had difficulty coordinating, became disorientated, and overall he became bed bound and totally incontinent. He was later diagnosed with liver cancer.
20. My father did not receive any treatment to clear the hepatitis. He only had the radiotherapy treatment for the liver cancer.
21. I do not know if he had side effects from the radiotherapy because he was so ill anyway.
22. I don't know if my father faced any difficulties or obstacles accessing treatment.
23. I don't know if my father's infected status impacted on his health and dental care for any other conditions.
24. Prior to my father's infection, both my parents went out a lot and had a good social life. My father enjoyed sporting events, country music, and dancing events but it all stopped because he couldn't do it anymore. It is devastating when someone who was very fit becomes ill so quickly.
25. My father did not face any stigma because nobody knew why he had liver cancer.
26. My father died on the 24 July 1980, aged 58 (my daughter's 8th birthday) after suffering a long and painful illness caused by the blood transfusion, which was administered by the NHS staff. We only knew he had hepatitis when we saw his death certificate. We all thought he had died from liver cancer by an unknown cause.

27. My father's health affected his work. He had to give up his job as a lorry driver. His job entailed heavy work and he was unable to do it once he became very ill. He gave it up a couple of years before he passed away.

28. As my father was unable to work, this then had a financial affect because my mother didn't work either. My father was the main breadwinner in the house and he was the main source of any income.

29. As stated above my mother became my father's carer and cared for him day and night. My father kept my mother up all day and night because he wanted her to be there all the time. They received no help from the hospital.

30. My youngest sister was 20 years old at the time and living at home so she would have been impacted by what had happened to my father. My children were also affected because they didn't understand what was happening to their grandfather. It was horrible.

31. My father's death has had a massive impact on my daughter who was only 8 when her grandfather passed away. As stated above, he died on her birthday. I took her to the hospital to see him. His skin and eyes were so yellow and bright it horrified my daughter when she saw him. Even to this day she still remembers it.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/care/support**

32. I don't know if there were any obstacles in obtaining treatment. As stated above, the only treatment that he received was the radiotherapy for the liver cancer.

33. I can confirm that my father did not receive any care or support as a result of being infected with hepatitis.

34. No counselling or physiological support was made available to my father or any other family members. I don't think it would have helped because it wouldn't have made him any better.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

35. My father did not receive any financial assistance.

36. I have not received any financial assistance from any of the Trusts or Funds that were set up.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

37. The shame of it all is my father's medical records have been destroyed by the NHS. What happened to keeping all medical records in the Government archives (I thought this was the law)? We as a family feel that the NHS is completely responsible for our father's death by administering him with contaminated blood and later destroying any evidence, which related to it.

## **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

38. I am not seeking anonymity. However I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

39. I do want 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 03.12.2019.