Witness Name: Elizabeth Armstrong
Statement No: **WITN4125001**
Exhibits:
Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 16 June 2020.

I, Elizabeth Armstrong, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Elizabeth Armstrong. My address is GRO-C, GRO-C and I am 73 in GRO-C. I am single and work as a freelance artist. I have earnt a living over the past 19-20 years painting horses and I am the artist in residence at the Royal Windsor Racecourse. I also work at the Newbury and Cheltenham Racecourses.

2. 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 after an operation for Crohn's Disease.

3. 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.

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.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I was born in Broxbourne, but my parents later moved to Croydon and I was brought up in a loving home. After school, I went on to study at the Croydon Arts School.

6. I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease at the age of 15. I cannot see how the Crohn's was triggered, so it must have been hereditary.

7. An exploratory operation was carried out at Redhill General Hospital, which confirmed the diagnosis. I do not believe that I received a blood transfusion for this procedure.

8. Not long after the operation, I started to feel sick and the stitching, from the earlier operation, came undone whilst I was at Arts School. I was taken back to Redhill General and underwent major surgery – 6 inches was removed from my colon.

9. Given the severity of the operation, it was a necessity for blood to be transfused. I was informed that I was given a blood transfusion, but I am not aware of the quantity.

10. I had no idea that the blood was infected and was not warned of the potential risks ahead of the operation.

11. I was in theatre for 8 hours and remember waking up to lots of drips around me and tubes coming out of my nose.

12. My friend recalls visiting me in hospital and was also aware that I received a blood transfusion.

13. I was transferred to another hospital in East Surrey after the operation, where I remained for 2 months.

14. I have a huge scar across my body from where they cut me open – it is as if they used a carving knife. Nowadays the surgery for Crohn's is key hole.

15. Crohn's is now common amongst young people, but I remember having an interview with a social worker because they thought my parents were abusing me. Not long after the operation I had little red marks all over my skin. This may have happened because I was given contaminated blood.

16. It took me 12 years to recover from the operation and I experience severe pain down the left-hand side of my stomach whenever I get stressed. I choose not to take painkillers.

17. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998, at St Bart's Hospital, London.

18. A number of blood tests were taken and when I went in to have the tumour removed, I was informed that I also had HCV.

19. I was monitored every 6 months for years after the colon operation. I believe the HCV should have been identified earlier. It is important that viruses are detected early on so they are treatable.

20. I was referred to the Mortimer Market Centre – a sexually transmitted disease clinic just off Tottenham Court Road, for monitoring and treatment purposes.

21. Doctors at the Mortimer Market Centre provided advice in relation to cross contamination and risk of passing on the infection to others.

22. To confirm, I have no tattoos and have never taken intravenous drugs.

Section 3. Other Infections

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

Section 4. Consent

24. I presume that my father would have provided consent for the blood transfusion because I was only 15 at the time and very unwell.

25. I have always consented to blood tests, yet I was not informed that I would be tested for HCV when I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

26. I am not aware of being tested without consent for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

27. I did not know about the infection until 1998, so any effects I may have experienced I would have attributed to Crohn's.

28. I always suffered with Crohn's Disease and when I experienced pain in my stomach, I would feel extremely tired and spend 2 days in bed. Perhaps the Crohn's masked the symptoms of HCV.

29. I was never informed of the symptoms of an HCV infection and how it affects you.

30. I had no difficulty in obtaining treatment for HCV – the Mortimer Market Centre offered treatment a number of times, but I refused.

31. For many years I did not want the treatment for HCV because I have no partner to rely on financially and I had to earn a living. I was also put off by the frequent injections and the side effects associated with the medication.

32. I heard from members of the HCV trust that the treatment was horrific and I was scared to go ahead with it, but I recall being told that there would be a better treatment in years to come.

33. My liver was monitored from 1998 at the Mortimer Market Centre – I had regular scans and was informed of its condition. I found the medical professionals at the centre discrete and very nice.

34. In 2019 a doctor persuaded me to take the new treatment, which consisted of taking a daily tablet for 9 weeks. I chose to take the medication in the morning.

35. The doctor assured me that the new treatment was better than that they used to offer, but I still felt very sick, tired and tense whilst on the medication.

36. The treatment caused me to rest a lot as I often felt nauseous – this had a financial impact because I produced less work during this time.

37. The treatment was successful and my viral load for HCV is no longer detectable.

38. I have never felt depressed in my life, but lockdown happened just after I finished my treatment and I ended up feeling rather down.

39. Since the treatment, I developed high blood pressure and my hypertension was 200. I asked the doctor if this was due to the medication, but she has assured me that it is unrelated.

40. As a result of the high blood pressure, I have a blood clot at the back of my eye – this has affected my eyesight and has an impact upon my work. I am aware when my eye is hurting and this affects my whole thought process.

41. I developed gallstones, which may be a side effect of the HCV. I could not be operated on because of the scar tissues from my previous surgery – fortunately I have not had a lot of pain from them. Barnet Hospital has dealt with my treatment and no one has ever mentioned a link to HCV.

42. I was prescribed Tamoxifen after my cancer tumour was removed and it has its own side effects.

43. I never informed my dentist about my HCV infection and as a result there was never any impact on my dental care.

44. HCV had a profound effect on my social life and the potential to have a relationship diminished because I am a responsible person and did not want to infect anyone else. With sexual relationships you have to be very careful and I did not feel that I could reveal the infection as it would drive people away. It became a guilty secret.

45. Up until recently I did not tell anyone about my infection because I was ashamed and thought people would judge, as there is a lot of ignorance and stigma associated with the virus. I feel that HCV is often associated with HIV.

46. I never mentioned the infection to my family. Even though it is not my fault, I felt very embarrassed to tell them. I was very close to my father – he encouraged me to become an artist but he passed away in 2000. I was not as close to my mother.

47. Now that I have cleared the virus, I feel that I can tell people and potentially meet someone.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

48. I have never been offered any counselling or psychological support in relation to my HCV infection.

49. My GP (Dr Cane) does not have much knowledge on HCV and recently, when I asked for copies of my medical records, her receptionist was very abrupt.

50. Since my HCV diagnosis, I have been treated by the Mortimer Market Centre. My experience at the centre was very good – the staff are lovely and genuinely want to help people. I have seen various doctors over the years (including Professor William Roseburg and Dr Paul Trembling) and found that they were all of a high standard and sympathetic towards their patients.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

51. I was so busy surviving cancer and HCV that I did not realise there was financial support available for individuals who received infected blood.

52. I was informed about financial support in November 2019, when I started the HCV treatment. Staff at the Mortimer Market Centre provided me with a contact number for the HCV trust, who were very helpful and explained about the compensation available. They also mentioned the

work of the Infected Blood Inquiry and passed on my details to make a witness statement.

53. I applied to the EIBSS on 16 December 2019. My application has not been rejected, but the claim is on hold until I find evidence that I received a blood transfusion.

54. I was charged £73 to obtained medical records from my GP surgery. I have copies of letters from the surgeon (Dr R. B Mc Greigor) to my GP at the time, but evidence proving that I received a blood transfusion has been destroyed.

55. I found a local Crohn's support group, where I asked questions about my surgery. I was told to contact St Mark's Hospital because they specialise in Crohn's Disease. I questioned the likelihood of receiving a blood transfusion, to which I received a reply from a PA stating that the consultant was not prepared to answer.

56. I have also contacted the Royal College of Surgeons and asked if I could track down the work of my surgeon. They were not very helpful, but I may pursue this again.

57. Samantha May from the HCV trust has outlined areas to help me progress my claim – one of them being a witness interview with the Infected Blood Inquiry. I have found the ladies at the trust very helpful.

Section 8. Other Issues

58. It would be fair to say I have that I have experienced great difficulty in tracing my medical records and providing definitive evidence of the blood transfusion. Albeit I have the account of friends who confirm

seeing me in Hospital and can corroborate my account of having received a transfusion.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 10 — 10 - 2020