Witness Name: Joan McMillan
Statement No.: WITN2207001
Exhibits: none
Dated: 3rd July 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOAN MCMILLAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated the 5th November 2018.

I, Joan McMillan, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Joan McMillan. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1945 and my address is known to the inquiry. I have two boys, one is fifty and one is fifty two and I have one grandchild that is twenty five this year. I used to work as a Senior Staff Nurse at the Law Hospital and I was a nurse for around thirty years before I retired. I intend to speak about my experience of becoming infected with hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Infected

2. I was infected in either 1986 or 1987, I do not know the exact date I was infected. I know it was one of these dates because one my doctors, Dr Crofton at the Law Hospital, later managed to narrow it down to one of those dates. At that time, I was suffering from an iron deficiency and I was anaemic. Normally, you would be given iron tablets for anaemia but I had an allergic reaction to them once, and so I had to have blood transfusions to treat my anaemia. Between 1986 and 1987 I had two blood transfusions at the Law Hospital in Ward 20 for my anaemia. I was infected during one of those transfusions. I was being treated by Dr Buchanan during the time I received those transfusions.

3. I was made aware of the risks of having a blood transfusion beforehand but I knew all about them because of my role as nurse. I had been part of those conversations with patients myself. In those days, there was no hepatitis C, there was only hepatitis A and hepatitis B. We made people aware of the risks of a blood transfusion and I knew those risks myself. I did not know that hepatitis C was a risk during that time though.

4. I found out about my hepatitis C after an appointment at the Law Hospital, I cannot remember exactly when this appointment was but it was around twenty five years ago. I cannot remember what my appointment was for, but during that appointment they took some blood from me. A few days after I had been in, they called me to say they wanted me to come in to the hospital again and that Dr Crofton wanted to see me. I had no idea what it could be about but I remember having my sister come with me because it sounded serious. ,Dr Crofton told me that there was an infection in my blood and they thought it was hepatitis C. He said they needed to check it out. I had no idea how I could have gotten it, it was very confusing. He performed another blood test and a liver biopsy at that appointment and confirmed that I had contracted hepatitis C.

5. At the appointment I was diagnosed, they did not tell me a lot about the infection. They told me that I had hepatitis C and that I had some cirrhosis of the liver because of the infection. At that time, there was not a lot of information about hepatitis C anywhere, so I don't know what else they could have told me. The only information I had been given about hepatitis C was a leaflet about the infection I picked up during an appointment at my GP at the Orchard Medical Centre in Motherwell about twenty years ago.

6. I knew about hepatitis generally speaking because I was a nurse, but I did not know a lot about hepatitis C. At the appointment I was diagnosed, I was not given a lot of information but I think that is because so little was known about the infection at that time. Dr Crofton was really good with me though, despite the lack of information.

7. Until my diagnosis, I did not feel that anything was wrong with me. So I don't think they could have told me any earlier than they did.

8. Finding out about my diagnosis was all a bit of a blur. Although I was a Senior Staff Nurse, it was all quite baffling to hear at first. I don't think Dr Crofton could have been any better with me when he told me about my infection. He said he would look into it and find out what had happened. Sometime after my diagnosis, I cannot say exactly when, Dr Crofton managed to find the timeframe I was most likely infected. He worked out the infection was likely transmitted during the blood transfusions I had received between 1986 and 1987 for my anaemia. He told me he could not find the exact batch number but he put all the information he could in front of me. He reassured me that I was infected with a blood transfusion, there was nothing I could have done and said I should not blame myself. You don't expect these things to happen to you. I knew it was a liver disease but I was never a drinker, not then and not when I was younger either. So I knew alcohol was not the cause at least, but hepatitis C was a shock.

9. As a Senior Staff Nurse, having dealt with hepatitis A and B, I knew as soon as I had hepatitis C how it was passed from person to person through cross infection. I did not have to be told any of that.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I have not contracted any other infections other than hepatitis C as far as I know.

Section 4. Consent

11. I have never been treated or tested without my consent or without having knowledge of what they were doing beforehand.

Section 5. Impact

12. Being infected was really draining mentally, and at first I didn't want anyone to know. A lot of people when they first found out would not come near me, it was a terrible time for me. That really affected my mental health. I remember that if I ever had a plaster for something, every time I got home I would take my plasters off and scrub the wound till I bled and then put new plasters on. I felt I had to do that because I felt unclean from having this infection. It was tough for a long time. It felt like a black cloud surrounding me, or walking into a dark tunnel. There were times where, if I was out the house, I had to sit down and take a moment. It felt like I couldn't move with everything going through my head. It felt like I was falling into a black hole. But I learned to live with those episodes. I knew when they were coming and made sure I went somewhere to sit down and work through them. I eventually got over that hell with the help of my psychiatrist, Dr Ross.

13. Physically, I did not feel I had a lot of symptoms from the infection. I was not lethargic or losing weight or anything like that. I just learned to live with it. I accepted what was wrong with me and counted myself lucky I didn't have

something worse like HIV. It was really the mental side of the infection that troubled me most.

14. I felt really paranoid about passing on the infection to other people initially. I would always try and use different cutlery, plates and cups. I was always worried I would infect a patient when I was working or even my own children. That really had quite a bad effect on my mental health. It took a lot of reassurance from those around me to get over that.

15. I have never received treatment for my hepatitis C. Many years ago, when Harvoni came on the market, I was offered this as a treatment option. I thought that would be a good idea. . I went to see a Dr Miller at Monklands Hospital and she explained how the treatment would work and took some blood from me so they could do some tests. I cannot remember when this appointment was. After the results came back, Dr Miller brought me back in for another appointment and told me that she was not going to give me anything, not for the moment at least. She explained that my liver was scarred but it was not so scarred that it was life threatening. The scarring meant that I was not suitable for hepatitis C treatment. She told me that they would keep assessing me and not to worry because there are always new drugs coming out. She said one day there will be something that comes out that cures it, but at that point, there was no treatment available that would have been suitable for me.

16. I think part of the problem was they were not sure how a drug used to treat the infection would react with the medication I was already on. I was taking Risperidone and Citalopram at the time in relation to my mental health. Dr Miller said she did not want to upset my mental health. She said she would discuss things with my psychiatrist, Dr Cook, and try and come up with a plan. I told her to have that discussion with Dr Cook, but that I did not want anything to trouble my mental health. I could not start from square one again, mentally. After that, I did not receive any treatment at all. Every so often I get checked up on and they ask me how I am coping and make sure I am eating well but they don't talk about treatment.

17. I would not say I have had any problems accessing treatments. If anything came out, they would bring me in and ask me how I feel about it. Dr Miller said that as long as I feel I am coping, that's all that matters. Dr Miller always said I was more worried about infecting other people than I was about the infection itself. She always tried to reassure me about that.

18. I do not think there were any other treatments they could have given me. I think I'am too old to think about treatment now, I've lasted well and I'm still going.

19. My infection has not changed my treatment for anything. I'm always wary of my infection, cross infection is something that is always in the back of my mind.

20. My boys both know about my infection. At first it was hard to tell them but they have been really good in coping with it. My sons have always comforted me when I was worrying about infecting them. I've always told my granddaughter to be careful and not to touch other people's blood when she was growing up. She was a very caring wee girl when she was younger, she would always try to help me if I had a cut. But I just had to explain small things about my infection as she grew up. She knows all about it now, she understands. My family have always been there for me and they have not let it affect our lives.

21. After I split up with my ex-husband about fifty years ago, I didn't bother much with a social life. I was never one for going out much anyway. Even now I don't really go out unless it's for something special like a dinner with family or friends. So I would not say my infection changed a lot for me socially.

22. I sometimes travel to Australia to see my brother and sister and my infection means that travel insurance can be very expensive. I always pay it though because seeing my siblings, is always worth it. It is still quite a lot of money however.

23. I think there will always be a stigma around hepatitis C but it is not something I have dealt with a lot. I was in sheltered accommodation run by the council

around the time I was diagnosed. They always told me that if I ever had any trouble with anyone about it, I was to tell them and they would deal with it. That's the way I deal with it, I just laugh and get on with things. I know there is help out there if I need it.

24. Working with my infection was absolutely fine because the hospital knew about it, they were good with me. It never had an impact on me at work, other than my worries about passing the infection on.

Section 6. Treatment, Care and Support

25. I have never been offered any counselling or support because of my infection. I would not even know where to look for it. I do discuss the psychological support I received in section 5 for my other mental health issues.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

26. I have received money from the Skipton Fund. I think it was around £25,000 that I received from them initially. I cannot remember when I received that first payment. I think that amount has been topped up since then but I am not sure by how much. I found out about the Skipton Fund through the newspapers, it was on television as well. It was my mental health nurse that did the Skipton application for me but there weren't any problems in applying, it was quite straightforward.

27. I also receive money from the SIBSS. I receive £2,400 a month from them. I heard about the SIBSS through the newspapers as well and again, it was my mental health nurse who did the application for me. As far as I know there were not any issues with the application for that either.

28. I think that everybody who has been infected should get the same amount of money. I do not think it matters whether you have a lot in life or you don't,

hepatitis C affects you the same way. I feel everybody should get the same amount.

Section 8. Other Issues

29. I do not wish to be anonymous for this statement.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 13. 9. 2020