Witness Name: Joyce Hunter
Statement No.: WITN5611001
Exhibits: WITN5611002-
WITN5611003
Dated: 20.06.2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOYCE HUNTER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 6 May 2021.

I, Joyce Hunter, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Joyce Hunter and my date of birth is GRO-C 1947. I live in GRO-C, and my full address is known to the Inquiry. I was born in the GRO-C area and have always lived here. Before retiring, I worked as a seamstress making Barbour jackets and also worked in the bingo halls. I have three children, all of whom are now adults and I am proud to be a great grandmother.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with HCV, transmitted via a blood transfusion that I received during surgery. In particular, how I came to be infected, the nature of my illness, the treatment I have subsequently received and the impact it had on my life.

3. Most of the events I will discuss took place many years ago and I make this statement without the benefit of my medical records. There is much

I am no longer able to remember clearly and details such as dates are estimates.

4. My sister, Margaret, was present during my interview and has helped me to remember the facts as accurately as possible in my statement.

Section 2. How Infected

5. In 1989, I was being treated for cystitis. I was on a course of tablets for about six weeks, but then I was rushed to the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle because of the damage to my kidneys. I underwent emergency surgery to have one of my kidneys removed.

6. I was in hospital for six or seven weeks after the operation. I remember being told about the ins and outs of the surgery itself, but I had no idea that I had been given a blood transfusion at this stage.

7. Six years later, in 1995, I received a letter from Dr Chapman at the Newcastle Blood Transfusion Service. The letter stated that the blood I had received "*may have been carrying an infection known as hepatitis C virus*." I exhibit this letter in full here, dated 27 September 1995, (**WITN5611002**).

8. I booked an appointment at the Newcastle Blood Service, which is located in Newcastle's Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I don't actually remember being tested, but I assume that they tested me for HCV at this appointment as I was diagnosed with the virus there and then.

Section 3. Other Infections

9. As far as I am aware, I was not exposed to any infection other than HCV.

Section 4. Consent

10. I do not remember whether or not I was asked for consent to being given a blood transfusion, but since It was administered during surgery, it is impossible that I would have consented.

11. I do not recall giving specific consent for an HCV test prior to my diagnosis, but nevertheless I wouldn't have withheld this had it been requested. From thereon I have undergone numerous tests and have always provided consent.

Section 5. Treatment/Care/Support

12. I believe that I was given adequate information about the risks of transmission when I was diagnosed; I did have a good understanding of what it meant to be infected with HCV and I was aware of the precautions I needed to take.

13. I underwent two courses of treatment for my HCV. In the first instance I was prescribed Interferon treatment, which took the form of injections into my stomach. I didn't feel well whilst on this medication and I was taken off it before rather quickly. The only noticeable side-effect was persistent nausea, which significantly impacted my ability to carry out normal daily activities that I didn't feel able to continue the treatment.

14. After this treatment failed, it took a long time to be offered any other course of treatment. I can't remember when exactly, but I have since had two biopsies and I was informed that the state of my liver was improving. I was being reviewed on a yearly basis whilst they waited for Interferon-free treatments.

15. Then, about four years ago, I began a course of Harvoni, a very expensive medication for HCV. It took the form of daily tablets for a course of eight weeks. It was a long wait to get on this treatment, but it was worth it; I had no side-effects and ultimately, it cleared the infection. I exhibit here a letter, dated 23 March 2017, from Dr Mahrukh Hussain that confirms the Harvoni treatment was successful in clearing my HCV (**WITN5611003**).

Section 6. Impact

16. Following the transfusion that I now know have me hepatitis, I would say that I suffered some symptoms commonly associated with a HCV infection. I was tired all of the time and my skin turned a strange yellow colour. At the time, I was blissfully unaware of what those symptoms meant, and nor did any of my family; we just thought that it was related to my kidney issues.

17. When I first got my diagnosis, I lost a lot of weight; I actually went down to five stone at one point. I also struggled with extreme exhaustion, to the extent that I was falling asleep at work, and so I thought it best to inform my employer of my diagnosis. I wanted to be responsible; I was particularly conscious that you could easily prick yourself on the sewing machine, and I didn't want to infect others.

18. I wouldn't say that I experience stigma associated with my infection. At work I would say I noticed small changes in people's behaviour, but nothing that upset me. When I pricked my finger, for example, people wouldn't rush over to help as they did for everyone else.

19. Ultimately, I couldn't continue to work for much longer after I was diagnosed. I was falling asleep at my workspace and my energy levels depleted significantly. I was able to claim sick leave from work before I left and then I moved to benefits.

20. None of my grandchildren were born at the time of my diagnosis and I feared that I wouldn't live long enough to become a grandmother. Naturally, I worried that I didn't have long left and this did have an impact on my mental health. When they were born, I worried about the risk of infecting them, even though I knew it to be very small, but it was always at the back of my mind. I was scared of being near them and kissing them, which is something all grandparents would usually do.

21. I was offered counselling at various points after my diagnosis, but I had all the support I needed from my family. It was only really my relatives that knew about my infection, so I didn't experience a lot of stigma. A lot of people don't understand it at all and have no idea how rare transmission is, but this hasn't impacted me hugely.

22. I used to really enjoy swimming, but I stopped doing this after my diagnosis. I also stopped going on foreign holidays, mainly because of the difficulties in getting insurance cover. This is partly due to the cost; the minute you disclose an HCV infection it becomes too expensive. Plus, I also didn't like the idea of having to disclose my infection to an insurance company.

23. It also had an impact on my finances, but this wasn't so detrimental to my life. I didn't have a lot of money to begin with and, luckily, my children were all grown up and independent by this time, so I was able to get along by cutting back on a few things.

24. Finally, there was no impact on my ability to access medical care arising from my infection. My GP knew about the HCV and often wore gloves, which I didn't mind at all. I already had a full set of false teeth when I was diagnosed, so I had no need to go to the dentist either.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

25. I can't remember how I first became aware of the Skipton Fund. My daughter helped me put together my application and go through the whole process. I received a lump sum initially, which I believe was £20,000, and I now receive regular payments as well.

26. I remember not understanding why I was being given money in the first place, but I was quite happy with the amount if I'm honest. I was able to do some things with the house that I had wanted to do for a long time and the regular payments mean that I am able to live comfortably as well.

Section 8. Other Issues

27. I've been asking why this happened to me for a long time. The doctors told me it was because they didn't screen the blood. In any case I just got on with it – I am generally a quiet person and I don't like to make a fuss.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 20 - 6 - 21