Witness Name: Graham Bee
Statement No.: WITN5952001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 24/01/2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRAHAM BEE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5 November 2021.

I, Graham Bee, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Graham Bee. My date of birth is GRO-C 1954 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I have two children and live in a small town in County Durham. I keep active and I enjoy cycling and on average, I cycle about 15km a day.

2. I have worked in all sorts of jobs over the years. When I first left school, I worked as a bricklayer because my father was a bricklayer. Shortly after my accident, I worked in a bakery and then later opened up my own bakery, and also a DVD store. I then worked as a delivery driver for Iceland. Most recently, I have been driving mini buses until retirement after the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020. I am nearly sixty-eight years old but I was not ready to retire. It was the biggest decision I had made in a long time but I am happy with it.

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

4. I confirm that I am not legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement.

5. The Inquiry Investigator has explained the Inquiry's statement of approach and 'Right to Reply' procedure. I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

6. The Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. I can confirm that I do not wish to seek anonymity.

Section 2. How Infected

7. In the early 1970s, I was twenty-eight years old and working as a refractory bricklayer on various building works. I used to work on blast furnaces and big industrial stack chimneys. I was self-employed, and the companies would not insure me because I had to climb about two-hundred feet up the Drax power station.

8. One morning I was waiting for a lift from a friend after work. He was supposed to come and pick me up in a van from the red car steelworks. The building was still in the construction stage, and I was walking on foot waiting for my friend when a motorbike came out of nowhere and ran me over. I believe the motorcyclist had stolen the bike and lost control of it, crashing into me. He was later convicted of dangerous driving.

9. I was taken to St Hilda's Hospital in Hartlepool (which has since closed down), as I had suffered severe injuries. I had two compound fractures

of the femur, a fractured skull, broken ribs, and I lost the lower part of my left leg, below the knee.

10. My injuries required multiple operations, and I remained in the hospital for nine months. The doctors put rods in my right leg, which I still have to date. The doctors told me that my femoral artery had been severed, and if I had not been a fit young guy, I might have lost my life.

11. I lost a lot of blood because of the femoral artery, and I required a blood transfusion, although I do not know at which point, I had the transfusions. I had at least half a dozen surgeries, so it could have been at any point during these procedures. I have never requested my medical records, and so I'm unsure of the precise details.

12. I suffered from various complications resulting from the accident, which went on for about two years. I had to have skin grafts and a re-amputation because my leg was not healing, so I went back into the hospital about six months after being first discharged.

13. My condition had been life-threatening, so I had not been in any state to think about the blood I was being given.

14. After I came out of the hospital, my wife and I moved houses, and I moved on with my life. I could no longer work in construction due to the loss of my leg, so I decided to work in a bakery which later turned into me owning my own bakery.

15. Several years after my accident, I became a regular blood donor. I was grateful to the blood donors who had donated blood that had helped save my life, so I wanted to pay it forward. I believe that I had received about twenty pints of blood, so my aim was to match that, if not give more.

16. I used to go to the same donation centre all the time, but about ten years after my accident and hospital stay, when I was about forty years

old, I went to a different donation centre to donate blood. Afterwards, I received a letter stating that it would be an offence for me to donate more blood, and the letter went on to advise me to book an appointment to see my doctor.

17. I was a bit worried about the letter, as I thought I might have leukaemia or something. I had donated about fourteen pints of blood over the years by this point.

18. My GP, Dr Mackenzie, then confirmed that I had contracted Hepatitis C. I had heard about hepatitis, but I thought it was one of those illnesses you contracted abroad, and I had travelled abroad many times. Dr Mackenzie told me that there was nothing to worry about, and I could carry on with life as normal.

19. In hindsight, think Dr Mackenzie did not know what HCV was, or perhaps because he planned to retire soon, he did not want to get involved.

20. About six months after my diagnosis, I went back to see my GP. The doctor who took over after Dr Mackenzie retired was much younger, Dr Bolt, and he was the one who said I should be worried. He referred me to Professor Basindine at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.

21. I cannot remember much about my first appointment with Professor Basindine. Still, I remember asking him for a bottom line, to which she responded that unless I was cured of HCV, I would die prematurely either from liver cirrhosis or cancer.

22. Professor Basindine was the one who confirmed that I had contracted HCV through one of the blood transfusions after the motorbike accident.

23. Still, I don't feel like I was fully informed about HCV at the time of my diagnosis.

24. During this period, I had begun to experience symptoms of HCV. I felt tired, but I initially put that down to my work and my leg disability. I had to also keep attending my local limb centre because I was having problems with my legs. The limb centre told me that I had half the strength of someone without my leg disability whilst walking one-hundred yards. I even asked Dr Bald whether the HCV was causing my fatigue.

25. When I was about forty-two, I had a liver biopsy which was done overnight. A large needle was injected through the ribs with no anaesthetic, then I had to lie still for six to eight hours. It was a painful procedure, but they said the liver would repair itself within those hours.

26. The purpose of the biopsy was to check how far the HCV had progressed, and I was informed that the results of the biopsy confirmed that it was an acute infection.

27. I have never received medical treatment abroad and I have no tattoos. I have never used intravenous drugs or lived the kind of lifestyle that could have put me at risk of contracting HCV.

28. I think that when I was first diagnosed, knowledge about HCV and the treatment was still in its infancy. I don't think they knew what they were doing and learnt about it through trial and error.

29. They told me that I could die of cirrhosis or liver cancer, but they could not tell me anything more. It was basically like handing me a death sentence. It affects you mentally even though you do not realise that it does.

Section 3. Other Infections

30. I do not believe that I have received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

31. I was not in a position to sign any consent forms, even if they had been offered to me when I required the blood transfusion. I was in agony, a bone that had ripped through muscle was sticking out of my leg, and I could have died of shock if I had not been given painkillers.

32. I was a part of several HCV drug trials, and I believe they treated us like guinea pigs because they did not even know what they were putting in our bodies.

Section 5. Impact

33. My ex-wife and I had got divorced, but the specialists at the Freeman Hospital told me to inform her of my HCV diagnosis so that she could get tested. I had to make sure that my son from my first marriage got tested for HCV. He was living in Australia at the time, but I still had to let him know. It was such a horrible experience.

34. I had a new partner, and we had a child, so they also had to get tested. This was a very worrying time and I was so relieved when all of their tests came back negative.

35. I was concerned about my HCV diagnosis because of the information from the doctors that I could die prematurely, if the illness was not cured. I told the doctors that I was open to any treatment if it would cure the HCV, and thus began a nightmare of various drug trials.

36. I believe that I was part of at least six drug trials. I cannot remember the name of some of the medications, but they made me feel even worse. I was tired, nauseous and feeling generally unwell. Each trial lasted about a year, and I had to go to the hospital every few weeks whilst I was taking the medication to see if it was working. If the tests came back that I was still HCV positive, then they would withdraw the medication and I would have to start a new medication again.

37. I had six liver biopsies during this period, all of which were very long and painful procedures.

38. After a while, I was offered the Interferon and Ribavirin combination treatment. During this treatment, I experienced the worst side effects I have ever had, but it was the medication that finally worked.

39. I developed skin conditions, feeling ill, suicidal thoughts, mood swings and brain fog. I am generally a positive person, but my outlook became very dark during that period. When I was working, I was shattered all the time and could not concentrate on anything.

40. As I mentioned above, the side effects of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment were shocking. It was horrible having to inject myself daily. Initially, it was a big needle in a little bottle before they upgraded to those things that look like an EpiPens. Some days it hurt like hell injecting myself, and I think it impacted me psychologically as I began to dread having to inject myself.

41. I could not hold down a full-time job during the treatments (which impacted my finances), and my relationship fell apart. I was essentially going through the treatment alone. It was a bad time for me physically, mentally and financially.

42. I managed to go part-time as a delivery driver for Iceland but was shattered. I had to travel to Newcastle every week for check-ups and I

arranged my work schedule around this. It took a good hour to get from Hartlepool to Newcastle. I used to leave first thing in the morning and then go from the hospital straight to work. It was also not easy because I was travelling there weekly.

43. I did not always see Professor Basindine, instead there was a specialist HCV nurse assigned to a group of us patients. She would administer the tablets and fill out our expense sheets to cover the cost of fuel.

44. I tried to work around my appointments, and I could not work full time in general because of my health. I used to work eight-hour shifts from Monday to Wednesday, one week and the following Thursday to Sunday. The shifts were prearranged in fortnightly blocks, and if I had a shift clash with my appointment, then I could say to one of the other drivers that I had to be at the hospital and they would swap shifts with me.

45. However, the job changed managers frequently, and when we ended up with a new boss who was not open to this kind of flexibility. As a result, I was forced to quit. She wanted me to work four hours each day, six days a week. It would have been impossible for me to work this pattern, so I had to leave even though I had worked there for six years.

46. I could have easily said I was disabled and asked for government assistance and social housing, but that is not how I have been raised. I am from a hardworking family. My dad was a hardworking man, and my mother raised four children, so it was ingrained in me to be independent. Now, my mum is ninety-four years old and still very independent.

47. Two weeks into the trial of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment, I had to travel abroad, and so I took my medication with me. When I came back from my trip, I had developed blisters all over my legs and arms.

48. I had just started the trial, so I did not know much about the medication. I believe that the sun may have interacted with the Ribavirin tablets, and I developed a sensitivity to it. They never told me that this was a possibility or that it was what happened to me. I just came to the conclusion myself. They only said that my blood pressure was high.

49. My dad sadly passed away shortly after I came back from that trip which was devastating.

50. After the course of treatment, about seven years ago, Professor Basindine at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle informed me that I was clear of HCV. There has been no follow up since then. Although, it still lives in the back of my mind that I could die. HCV is a silent killer because there is no pain, and I would not have found out if I had not been informed.

51. I initially had an ultrasound when I was cleared of HCV, which was much better than the painful liver biopsies that I previously had to endure.

52. I had remarried the mother of my child, but we ended up splitting up. I cannot say if it was the pressure from the mood-swings that I suffered from during the treatment, along with the other side effects. I was very ill while on HCV medication.

53. My son is thirty years old now and works as a police officer in Stockton. His mother moved to Stafford after we split up, 173 miles away from Hartlepool. I drove down every few weeks to see him despite my

illness. He then moved in with me when he was about nineteen and recently moved to Stockton-on-Tees. We are very close.

54. Between losing my leg, being diagnosed with HCV and receiving treatment, I have also been through two divorces. I have been single ever since because I cannot put myself through that again and I still worry about the HCV.

55. I love to travel, and I always travel to the far east during the Christmas and New Year period. I have been to Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Australia, and I have friends who live abroad. This passion was impacted during my treatments.

56. I have spoken to other people who also had nasty side effects, and I think we were guinea pigs because if I were diagnosed now, I would not have to go through all of that.

57. I feel guilty that I had given about fourteen pints of blood before I was diagnosed with HCV, and I worry that some other person has contracted HCV through my blood. I gave blood in good faith, but it has been a worry foe me over the years. Furthermore, if people had not donated blood when I had my accident, then I would not be sitting here alive today.

58. Since I have been diagnosed with HCV, my life has changed drastically. It had a massive impact on me financially because I could not work full-time, and I had to give up my businesses too. Part-time wages affect the prospects of securing a mortgage, and I had to give up luxuries like going out.

59. It also affected my relationships and I have been divorced twice. When I got divorced, I had to go from living in a six-bedroom house to living in a flat above a shop. I also believe that my financial situation and the fact that I was working part-time affected my marriages because I was

no longer earning a lot of money. Also, it was horrible to go home to my wife and inform her that I now have to wear a condom. It puts a strain on the relationship.

60. When I began the Interferon and Ribavirin treatment, they advised me that it was a really harsh drug, worse than what people undergo with chemotherapy. When I was on it, I thought to myself, is it worth putting yourself through this?

61. I used to inform dentists and other medical professionals that I was HCV positive. The dentist used to make me wait until the end of the day and I was seen last. I felt like a bit of a leper. It was as though I was walking in with something smelly on my shoe.

62. Even the man I used to see at the limb centre (which I attended for my leg amputation) would wear a face mask during his appointments with me. Before the current global pandemic, I had only seen people wear face masks abroad due to air pollution. Even after being cleared of HCV, he still treated me like that.

63. I was on a fantastic wage when I worked on construction sites. As a refractory bricklayer, I was paid £250 a week back then when miners were receiving £45 a week. We also used to be paid bonuses based on how much brick we laid. After my accident, companies would not insure me because of my leg, so I could no longer do that job.

64. I successfully sued for the motorbike accident, where a joy-rider crashed into me. I was a member of the Transport and General Union, so they sued the driver. There was no health and safety back then, so Unions were necessary to look after you. Nowadays, most of these construction companies cannot get away with the practices they used to do back then.

65. When I hear stories of other people who have been impacted by HCV, HIV and vCJD - I feel lucky. I know I also had it bad, but I feel lucky to be alive today.

66. I used to reflect on the story of a man who died of HIV in my small town back in those days, and I remember how much stigma he faced. They would chase him out of the pubs, and if he had a pint, no one would touch the glass or drink out of it. He was a haemophiliac who was also infected by contaminated blood.

67. I do not believe that I have experienced stigma from my HCV diagnosis from the people I know. I am not a private person, so my diagnosis is not something I hide. I have told close friends and family members. Most people don't know about HCV unless they research it. I like to see the funny side of life, so when people have made fun of my leg, I see the humour in it.

68. I am single, and it puts me off mixing with people because if I met someone I am interested in, I would have to explain why I have to wear a condom. Although I don't have HCV, I would probably want to wear one for my peace of mind. Therefore, it affects my prospects for a future relationship and that is probably why I have not remarried.

69. I did not go out for a long time. I was advised that I couldn't drink while on the HCV treatment. I used to play football and darts before I lost my leg, but after I lost my leg, I took up pool instead. Most of these sports involve drinking, so I avoided going out socially for a while. Male friends would not understand me not drinking. Drinking is part of the Northern culture. Macho, working-class culture where men are men. I felt isolated during this time and so I made excuses to avoid those spaces for a while.

70. I believe I should be routinely tested for HCV every twelve months for my peace of mind. At the moment, I have no clarity, which is not reassuring because I did not know I had HCV in the first place all those

years ago. The Inquiry Investigator has advised me to get in touch with my GP to discuss this.

71. Now that I am cured but still not sure if everything is alright, I am still looking for that peace of mind. They tell you that you will always have the virus but not the infection, which means I still cannot give blood.

72. I recently went for a check-up for my blood pressure medication, Statin, and I spoke to the doctor about my concerns about whether I still had HCV. She dismissed it and said that she is not a specialist.

73. I am not the kind of person who complains a lot or goes to the doctors whenever I have a minor complaint because I believe that there are others more in need than I am.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

74. I think I was offered counselling services at one point, but I did not take it up. I cannot remember if I spoke to anyone in detail about counselling or psychological services at the time of my diagnosis or immediately afterwards.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

75. I found out about the Skipton Fund from one of the nurses at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.

76. Initially, I did not get much support from the Fund. It seemed to be means-tested, and they made me feel like I was begging.

77. I received the stage one payment of £20,000 a few years ago, and in August 2021, I received a top-up of £30,000, which I know was paid to keep in line with what people in Scotland received. The money

appeared in my account one day with no warning, which was a bit frightening until I got the letter in the post which confirmed the source of the funds.

78. I was moving house at the time, so the support was helpful. I think the financial support has gotten better over the years.

79. I currently receive £1,556 per month from the English Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS).

80. From what I gather in terms of financial support, everyone affected will be compensated by the government, so I am not worried about whether these payments will stop.

81. I do not know if it will be a lump sum or monthly payment, but I can plan life around it once I know. According to my research, I have read that the Paymaster General has to make a decision about compensation by February 2022 and that his decision has no impact on this Inquiry's work. I believe that the government appointed a minister to look into the matter of compensation, and this minister is working with the Paymaster General. Afterwards, a proposal is likely to be passed on to this Inquiry.

82. For me, this issue has been going on for forty years and so needs to be finalised immediately. If people are going to be compensated for the devastating impact that the infected blood scandal has had on their lives, then I think we want to be able to enjoy it. It makes me feel like we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

83. I think the support I receive now is adequate.

Section 8. Other Issues

84. I think the government realises that someone is at fault. They made a mistake for many years, costing people their lives. They must have been aware of the risks of pooling blood and not screening these.

85. I cannot get my head around the fact that blood and blood products pooled from thousands of people's donated blood was not tested when they knew that one single infected blood could contaminate an entire pool.

86. I understand that the U.K was not self-sufficient at the time, but they could have used blood donated by people from this country for my blood transfusion. At least doctors would know where it came from in that case. I understand blood products required vast amounts of blood, so this advice may not have worked for those.

87. I watched the interview of Kenneth Clark, and I thought his attitude was disgusting. It seemed clear that he was trying to pass the buck and was skirting the issue by avoiding answering questions directly.

88. The worst part about it was when they realised that there was a problem, but they carried on giving people contaminated blood. I know they say what the alternative was, but when you receive blood during surgery, your first instinct would not be to consider whether it might be contaminated. You assume that the medical professionals and health authorities would have tested the blood and deemed it safe. You do not think it will be filled with rubbish because you trust the medical professionals. You consent because you believe it will be good for you rather than lead to all these problems further down the line.

Statement of Truth

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

GRO-C

Signed ______________________

Dated 24/1/2022