Witness Name: Stephen Anthony Smith
Statement No: **WITN6605001**
Exhibits: Nil
Dated: 10 March 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF STEPHEN ANTHONY SMITH

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 26 August 2021.

I, Stephen Anthony Smith, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Stephen Anthony Smith. My date of birth is GRO-C 1963 and my address is GRO-C, Cornwall, GRO-C. I am married to my wife Marina. I have a daughter, aged 27 and stepson, aged 40, from a previous marriage. I lost my second wife, Yvonne to cancer, having been together for 22 years. I used to run a business on the London underground as a protection master, where I protected the public from injury. However, I had to give this up in

October 2015 due to poor health, later found to be attributable to my then undiagnosed Hepatitis C. I have also been an Estate Agent.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV) following a blood transfusion after an accident in 1985. In particular, I intend to discuss he nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on the lives of myself and my family.

3. I can confirm that I have chosen not to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me.

4. As you know I have been interviewed by the Telegraph Newspaper and also appeared in the local press, therefore I have no need for anonymity. I am more than prepared to discuss the whole contaminated blood scandal publically and for my story to be told in full. I do not require anonymity.

5. I believe everyone should be aware of this and where possible everyone should be tested for HCV on a routine basis.

6. I can also confirm that the Inquiry Investigator has explained to me the 'Right to Reply' procedure, and that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

7. I wish to acknowledge that naturally as time passes, memories can fade. I have been able to provide approximate timeframes to matters based on life events. However, these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates.

8. I can confirm that I have provided my statement with access to my medical records. However, after an arduous process in obtaining my records last year, I discovered that they were in incomplete and

crucially missing any record of my operation in 1985 where I was given blood. I will go on to discuss this in more detail in Section 7 on 'Financial Assistance'.

9. My wife Marina has been present during the course of this interview and assisted me with some dates and events, which I needed to be reminded of.

Section 2. How Infected

10. In June 1985, I married to my first wife, Maria. I've been married 3 times; divorced, widowed and remarried, Maria and I bought our first house in Romford, Essex. At the time, I was a debt collector for the Eastern Electricity Board, which was a good job. Maria worked for the same company.

11. On 3 December 1985, it was arranged that we would go food shopping. I arrived home earlier than Maria, at around 5 or 6 o'clock. Back then I was very fit and a talented runner. I ran for my county and GB and had hopes to be selected for the Olympics.

12. To make use of the spare time I had before we went shopping I went for a quick 3 mile run, little did I know that this decision was going to have long and devastating consequences. I returned home, shortly followed by my now ex-wife. She wasn't happy that I was still in my tracksuit and not showered. Stupidly we got into a row.

13. Being the feisty 22-year-old that I was, I swung my right leg out and accidentally kicked the kitchen backdoor. My leg went straight through the lower pane of glass, which was like a guillotine. I can remember this quite vividly because it nearly killed me. I didn't feel any pain whatsoever. But then I felt liquid running down my leg. I looked down and gasped when I saw blood gushing from a huge wound at the top of my ankle.

14. Whilst pulling shards of glass from the wound, I fell to the floor. I clasped my hands over my ankle. Blood was squirting through my fingers. Having been for a run, it didn't help as the blood vessels were more dilated and my heart was still pumping. I was in shock. Maria was screaming. I told her to call an ambulance. I wrapped a tea towel as best as I could around my ankle, which soaked with blood within seconds.

15. As I was drifting in and out of consciousness, I noticed a blue light. It was the best thing I had seen in my life. The ambulance arrived in 10 minutes. By this point, I had collapsed backwards on the floor. My hands were outstretched and I could feel my blood all around me. I could hear a voice ushering to 'get in here quick.' My next recollection is being carried into the ambulance. I heard someone saying to 'get the blue light on and hurry up.'

16. When I was in the ambulance, a paramedic apologised and told me what he was about to do was going to be painful and it was. I cried out in pain as he applied a belt or something high up on my leg. I woke up in Harold Wood Hospital, beside my dad who was holding my hand. A doctor explained that I had cut my leg severely and that I would need an operation. I remember being absolutely terrified.

17. A medic injected me in the leg. He assured me that it would calm me down and help me to sleep. It didn't work. I started to panic to my dad. I vividly remember being terrified that they were going to operate on me whilst I was still awake. Both my dad and I were crying. I was wheeled into the operating theatre and given anaesthetic. By the time I counted to 9, I was unconscious.

18. The next thing I remember is waking up in Hospital. I was totally confused and disorientated. I didn't know where I was. My bed was beside a window, through which a street lamp was illuminated. I

thought I might be in heaven or hell, and that the lamp I was facing was an angel.

19. I reached for my leg, disconcerted to feel the hardness of a plaster cast. I was relieved to discover that I hadn't lost my foot, although my toes were black due to the loss of blood flow. I panicked and then then up. The curtains surrounding my bed were opened.

20. I then noticed the dreaded bag of blood that would ruin the following 37 years of my life. I can vividly remember the stand and the bag of blood entering my arm through an intravenous line. The nurses urged me to be quiet as it was the middle of the night and the other patients were still asleep. They explained that I had lost a lot of blood and therefore needed a blood transfusion. I had severed an artery and had lost about 4 pints.

21. I fell asleep, only to awake in the early hours immensely thirsty. The gentleman beside me said to me, 'you've had a tough night, haven't you?' I asked him for some of his water as the nurses had told me that I wasn't supposed to drink any fluids. Over the next week, I received several more units of blood. I can remember that the bags were changed on various occasions.

22. The next day, an Irish nurse approached me. She was absolutely lovely. She jestingly said to me, 'you owe me a pair of shoes'. She explained that she had been on duty the night that I arrived. She didn't have the time to change out of her brand-new pair of suede shoes. Apparently, my blood poured all over them. She assured me that the Hospital paid for a new pair.

23. The surgeon told me that I had been very lucky. I had nearly died, having severed an artery and tendon in my right foot, together with significant nerve damage. I had lost over 4 pints of blood which would need to be replenished. He warned me that I could lose my foot. The only reason I kept my foot was because the bone remained intact.

24. Over the course of the next few days, the staff tested the sensation in my foot by pushing a pin into the sole. I didn't feel anything for a few days. On the fifth or sixth time, I felt a sensation. The colour was gradually returning to my toes and I was hopeful that I might make a full recovery.

25. After receiving the blood transfusion, I had pins and needles and felt very persistently very hot. I had a fan on my face. I was told that this was common after significant blood loss. I can remember my sister's shock that I had a fan on my face in December.

26. I was impatient to go home. The matrons in those days were very strict. The nurses were less encouraging. Finally, the matron agreed to discharge me if I could manage to walk the 10-15 metres down the corridor and climb some small steps using my crutches. When I tried to move from the bed, I almost passed out as I was so weak.

27. Nevertheless, I was confident and determined. As I said before, I was an athlete for Essex with ambitions to run for Great Britain. Her scepticism only motivated me more. My fellow patients were cheering me on. I managed to complete the walk, although I returned to bed exhausted and pouring with sweat. She made one final bid to encourage me to stay but I discharged myself. In retrospect, I think I should have stayed another week.

28. My parents and my neighbour, Colin visited my house the day after my admission. They explained that there was blood everywhere which had since congealed; on the floor, the walls, across the cupboards. My dad had never seen that much blood in his life and was amazed that I was still alive. As I mentioned previously, I remember being slumped on the floor, with my hands wet from the pool of my blood. They had to scrape the blood up off the floor with cardboard.

29. I returned to the Hospital to see the surgeon every three weeks. After 8 weeks, my neighbours took me to the Hospital to get the plaster of Paris removed. My wife was at work that day. My leg was a mess, with the combination of scarring and stitching. I had also lost a lot of muscle mass.

30. I had physiotherapy for several weeks. However, my foot and leg never entirely recovered. My toes are still somewhat stiff and pointed at an odd angle. I also have muscle wastage on the right calf and my right leg is slightly smaller than the left. I've tried to compensate for this through a lot of cycling.

31. Fortunately for me, I was working for a well-established company, the Eastern Electricity Board, who looked after me during the course of my recovery. I was also part of a union which provided additional support. I remained on full pay for the following four months in which I was convalescing.

32. I was still with my first wife Maria at the time. My injury marked the beginning of the end. Our marriage was never right after that. There was some friction between us about the circumstances surrounding my injury. We both blamed each other, although deep down, of course I understood that it was my fault.

33. Despite our differences, Maria and I sold the house and moved to a beautiful house in Doddinghurst, which sits in the countryside of Essex. I was thrilled with the move. GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C In 1989, Marie and I sold the house and divorced.

34. I moved to Stratford in East London with a friend from Ghana. It was difficult moving from the scenic countryside into a smoke polluted and congested city. I stayed with my friend for six months. I wasn't very

mentally stable during this time. I was drinking and partying a lot. My dad was extremely worried about me and my future.

35. I met my second wife, Yvonne at a Ghanaian party. I was having a great time. I caught her eye. She came bowling over to me, and, noticing that I was the only white man amongst a group of Ghanaians, she jokingly asked if I was lost. We fell in love and married. We were together for 22 years until her death from cancer in 2012.

36. At the time that we met, Yvonne already had a 9-year old son from a previous relationship, who I raised as my own. He is now 40 years of age. Together we also had our daughter, Shanice, GRO-C

GRO-C

37. About a year prior to her death, Yvonne repeatedly consulted with her GP due to complaints of stomach pains. She was initially misdiagnosed by an incompetent doctor with IBS and sent away with laxatives. I later learnt that 40,000 women a year are misdiagnosed with IBS when they could in fact have cancer.

38. She continued to go back and forth to the doctor in Langdon Hills in Basildon; there was obviously something seriously wrong with Yvonne. For some unknown reason no blood tests were taken, we were told it wasn't serious and carry on with the laxatives etc.

39. Then one evening Yvonne was in absolute agony with a water infection. I called the surgery and asked for the Dr to come out, she refused to visit and only succumbed when I threatened to call 999. When she eventually arrived, she conceded that Yvonne did indeed have a temperature. I wanted to throttle her as I had been telling her this all along.

40. Two months later, we went to the surgery again. Yvonne was being sick. And suffering from stomach pains. I had a row with the doctor, of whom I was never very keen. They struck me off from the doctor's surgery which was a blessing in disguise because we went to another doctor who was great. He was totally different to our previous GP.

41. Taking a look at her medical records, he asked what tests she had received. He explained that the previous doctor with whom I had come into conflict had been particularly unpopular with several staff at the surgery. He had even moved practices because of her attitude and a couple of the nurses had even taken her to court.

42. In December 2011, we were referred to a consultant, Dr Jarvis at Basildon Hospital, who was lovely. Yvonne was then given a series of ultrasounds, MRI's, Cat scans and endoscopies. She was in a bad way. The doctor at Orsett Hospital examined her. We thought she would probably just need a hysterectomy. He told us to have a nice Christmas and asked that I look after Yvonne. He was obviously trying to tell me something, though I didn't realise at the time.

43. On 6 January 2012, we went to Basildon Hospital to see Dr Jarvis. As Yvonne and I were in the waiting room, she burst out laughing at a message from her friend. She had such a distinctive cackling laugh. I told her off and that we were amongst other patients who weren't well. Ironically, she was probably the most unwell of anyone in the room. She was Jamaican in origin yet her skin was yellow. She had also lost a lot of weight.

44. We were called into a tiny little room where we were greeted by Dr Jarvis and an NHS female nurse. I wondered what the nurse was doing in the room. I held her Yvonne's hand. Dr Jarvis asked how she was feeling. She explained that she was still in pain. We knew something wasn't right. He then broke the devastating news that Yvonne had cancer. I immediately assumed she could have an operation. Dr Jarvis then added that the cancer was terminal.

45. I felt like I was on a film set. Even though I knew what this meant, I didn't want to know. I asked him the question everybody asks. "How long" He said 'five months'. I thought he was going to say years. I was holding the hand of the woman I loved. My whole demeanour changed.

46. I was in denial and assured her that she wasn't going to die. The nurse reiterated that Yvonne was terminal. Whilst she was just telling the truth, I think her approach could have been more empathic. I swore at her and left the room where I had my first ever-panic attack and collapsed.

47. Getting up and leaving Yvonne by her own after receiving this news remains one of the biggest regrets of my life. I cracked at a time when she needed me. I stood outside the door and completely and utterly broke down. I couldn't breathe. This continued for about hour. I was given oxygen.

48. My friend, a larger-than-life character, arrived at the Hospital for moral support. He said to me, 'there is a woman in there who needs your help.' I returned to the room and apologised to Yvonne. She was dying and yet she was asking me if I was okay. I told her that we would get through it.

49. On 12 June 2012, Yvonne passed away from cancer of the liver (secondary). She was just shy of her 51st birthday.

50. She lived for 5 months following her diagnosis. Dr Jarvis was pretty spot on. Her death certificate lists the cause of death as liver cancer. Her liver was riddled with tumours, which eventually passed to her brain and lungs. They didn't know where it stemmed from.

51. Knowing now that I have had Hepatitis C for the past 37 years, I have suffered many sleepless nights worrying that I may have unwittingly infected Yvonne with HCV and that the virus caused her liver cancer. I

voiced my concerns to my HCV nurse, Helen Hampton, who has been diligently working to eradicate the virus in the South West of England by raising awareness in GP practices and hospitals.

52. I haven't yet told my daughter of my infection. I am also terribly worried about the possibility that she might be infected. This would destroy me, also because the likely conclusion would be that she caught it from Yvonne during childbirth. This would point to the significant likelihood that I transmitted the virus to Yvonne, which would be devastating.

53. Between 2007 and 2008, I began to experience stomach pains, shoulder pain and stomach swelling. I was also burping continuously. In around 2012, I was working outside Earls Court Station when I experienced a particularly severe bout of abdominal pain which persisted for several weeks.

54. My current wife Marina was best friends with my late wife. Prior to Yvonne's death, Marina and I were just friends. Around the time of Yvonne's death, Marina's 25-year relationship with her then husband was coming to an end. GRO-D GRO-D GRO-D They then divorced. I was still grieving over the death of Yvonne, with whom I had been happily married for 22 years.

55. GRO-C GRO-C My world crumbled. Yvonne had also always done the cooking and shopping. Marina began to help out. She became like a second mum to Shanice and also supporting her with 'women's issues' and her education as she was at college at the time.

56. Over time, Marina became increasingly involved in our lives and vice versa. Between 2015 and 2016, Marina was divorcing her husband, which was a protracted and arduous process. As I had worked as an estate agent in the past, I helped her to move into a new property.

57. I was struggling to live in the house that I had shared with Yvonne, particularly as she had not died in a hospice but at home. Every day I would be confronted with the trauma of this memory. I explained this to Marina who said that I could move in with her. We fell in love and began a relationship.

58. By 2014, I was still experiencing abdominal pain. Marina used to work in a private hospital. Following an ultrasound and MRI, I was diagnosed with gallstones which was later confirmed by the NHS. My gallbladder was removed at a hospital in Chelmsford. No one thought to test me for Hepatitis C or to enquire about possible receipt of a blood transfusion in the past.

59. Knowing what I know now, the Hepatitis C probably affected my liver, gall and bile duct. They did blood tests, yet nobody thought to test me for Hepatitis C. This is despite my GP discovering that my Amylase levels were 'through the roof'. The doctor asked if I was alcoholic. I briefly drank heavily following the death of my wife, but I have never been an alcoholic. I am now practically tee-total.

60. I was merely prescribed the painkiller lansoprazole and sent away. I could open a chemist with the quantities of painkillers I have been prescribed over the years. They offered temporary relief but my stomach would immediately distend as soon as I finished the course. I was in so much pain.

61. After an episode of severe pain, I went to A&E at Basildon Hospital. They told me I would have to stay in. I knew something was wrong at this point. I suspected that I had pancreatic cancer. He gave me a blood test. The doctor told me that my Amylase levels were 'through the roof'. I didn't know what this meant. I later went home and discovered that this is a possible indicator of pancreatic cancer.

62. I had an endoscopy. I opted against the anaesthetic. It's a very uncomfortable procedure. I felt as if I couldn't breathe. They found some redness in my stomach but nothing sinister. I was then given an ultrasound in exactly the same room as where my late wife was diagnosed with cancer. Again, I was asked whether I was an alcoholic. The possibility of pancreatic cancer was mentioned.

63. Between 2018 2019, I returned to Basildon Hospital for more MRIs and CT scans. I was told that my Amylase levels had decreased which I attributed to having given up drinking. Nevertheless, they were still very high. I had more blood tests. Again, I returned to Dr Lindo who diagnosed me with Post-Colostomy Macromastia Syndrome, which I am led to believe is the sensation of pain months or even years after an operation. However, I never fully grasped the nature of this condition.

64. My stomach was becoming increasingly distended. I was breaking out in sweats due to intense abdominal pain. I was given a CT scan. When I eventually procured my medical records, I found a note that I had 'no worrying pathology symptoms'. How wrong this was. He didn't test me for anything. I was not given a liver biopsy although the procedure was mentioned.

65. When I returned some weeks later. I paced the corridors like an expectant father in a black and white film. I was so scared. My wife had died of liver cancer and I thought I had the same illness as our symptoms were worryingly similar.

66. A young doctor told me that I didn't have cancer but that my liver was slightly enlarged and 'fatty'. I was drinking heavily at the time and attributed the state of my liver to this. Shortly afterwards, I stopped drinking. I am now practically tea total. Marina completely changed my diet. I do not eat red meat, just fish and vegetables.

67. In June 2020, Marina and I moved from Essex to Cornwall and married on 15 December that year. It was lovely. I had been coming to Cornwall intermittently since I was a child. I had bought a small holiday home here but eventually decided to move over full time. Marina followed me shortly afterwards.

68. Sadly, our relationship was not well received by many friends and family members. To say it's been difficult would be a grave understatement. My daughter was very accepting of our relationship. Jason has been less supportive. We were so close when Yvonne was alive, but in the last 2 or 3 years, we've barely had any contact.

69. Having moved to Cornwall during Covid-19, I remained with my GP practice in Basildon. I was continuing to return to Essex intermittently to pick up my prescription painkillers. At one point, I realised that it was about time I registered with a practice in Cornwall. This turned out to be one of the best decisions I had ever made.

70. Due to the Covid restrictions at the time I had a phone call consultation with Dr Croker, the GP at Helston Surgery in Cornwall. He asked me some questions, how I was and did I have any problems etc. My response was, oh the usual, stomach and back problems. When I said that he wanted to hear more so I explained my past medical history in more detail. He suggested that I should have some blood tests.

71. I was called into the surgery on three separate occasions within the space of two weeks for blood tests. I seriously thought that they had lost the samples. I started to suspect that something was awry due to the number of tests I was having in such a short space of time.

72. In January 2021, whilst I was at home alone, I received a phone call from Dr Croker. Marina was at St Michael's Hospital where she works as a Ward Clerk. He said he had some bad news and asked if I had company. He suggested that I sit down. I was perspiring with anxiety. I presumed that I had pancreatic cancer. He then old me that I had

Hepatitis C. I went into shock. I had heard of the virus but knew very little about it.

73. Dr Croker asked if I had shared needles or had any tattoos. I have never been an IV drug user and I have just one tattoo from a reputable establishment in Cornwall. I worked on the London Underground and came across a number of needles on the tracks but I certainly never had any needle-stick injuries. It was my job to prevent the public coming into contact with items like that. He then asked if I had a blood transfusion in the 1980s. I answered in the affirmative. He agreed to run more tests.

74. He recommended that I get in touch with the Hep C Trust. I spoke to GRO-A, who was lovely. You can't work for the Trust unless you have had Hepatitis. She was an encyclopaedia of knowledge. In the space of half an hour, she explained everything I needed to know about the virus. This was informative and overwhelming. I was crying down the phone with terror. She agreed to phone me the following day.

75. Marina came home after a stressful day on the ward. I told her that I had been diagnosed with Hepatitis C. It was only when she googled it that she realised how serious the virus was. GRO-C
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76. Following my diagnosis, I was determined to research and find out as much as I could about the virus. I learnt that there are three primary routes of infection: intravenous drug use, sex and blood transfusions. I have never been a drug user and sex carried only a two percent risk of transmission. There is no question in my mind that the source of my infection was the blood that I received in 1985. At diagnosis my viral load was 1058269 and my Genotype was 3A.

77. I was introduced to a lady called Helen Hampton. We've since become very good friends. She has helped me enormously. She arranged for me to have a Fibro scan. The elasticity of your liver indicates the extent of the damage. I believe there are four stages, stage 4 indicating cirrhosis. I was between 2 and 3, closer to 3, which is considered fibrosis. I was assured that treatment with Epclusa would hopefully reverse the damage.

Section 3. Other Infections

78. I been tested for HIV on various occasions, the results of which were negative.

Section 4. Consent

79. I was unconscious when I was given blood, which most likely saved my life. Nevertheless, in an ideal situation, I should have been told of the potential risks (if they were known in 1985) after I had regained consciousness. At least then I would have been aware and known of the risks associated and been able to live my life accordingly.

Section 5. Impact

80. My infection with Hepatitis C, which remained undetected and untreated in my body for some 36 years, has had a profound impact on my life in a plethora of ways. Within a year of receiving the blood transfusion in 1985, my mental health underwent a marked deterioration and I have not felt like the same person since. As I will mention later, I have now been told my HCV is undetectable. Since then I have noticed a vast improvement in my mental health, I am a lot more understanding and less angry.

81. When I was eventually diagnosed, my behaviour over the past four decades started to make sense. I realised I had 36 years of emotions to process. It's very difficult to reconcile with the reality that my infection with Hepatitis C may have accounted for my mental health struggles. I have had severe depression and anxiety for years. This since been affirmed by doctors' and nurses overseeing my care. I've lost the best years of my life.

82. In the last 15 years, my physical health started to deteriorate. Looking back, even before I met Yvonne, my health was suffering. I experienced enormous and inexplicable fatigue. I was doing triathlons as a young man and put my tiredness down to the physical exercise. I couldn't understand why, unlike my fellow athletes, I was having to take naps in the afternoon.

83. I strongly believe that my fitness has mitigated the potential effects of having Hepatitis C in my system, untreated for several decades. Doctors and nurses have told me that having had the virus for several decades, they were amazed I am still alive. Both running and cycling has been compromised by my failing physical health as a result of my infection. I still managed to do London marathons, but I regret that I could not run for Great Britain as I had hoped.

84. Following my accident, my parents noticed a difference in my personality. In 1986, within a year of receiving the blood transfusion, I was prescribed antidepressants. I was always a fiery and determined young man but I became short tempered, argumentative and unreasonable; traits, which have persisted up to the point my HCV, was treated. I was fighting with everybody. GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C

85. Nobody could understand what accounted for the change in my personality. More recently, I presumed that I must have bipolar. I said

to Marina that if I could have the top psychiatrist in the US, he or she might be able to tell me what on earth was wrong with me. I knew there must be some reason for my terrible mood swings.

86. My mental health became progressively unstable, worsening when I lost the love of my life in 2012. With hindsight, I can say that I was mentally and physically unwell because I had this filthy blood inside me. I began to drink heavily and developed a gambling addiction in which I lost thousands. It was the only thing I could do to take the pain away. Even at the casinos, I would pick a fight with anybody and everybody.

87. I cried when I completed my statement for the EIBSS as emotions that I'd bottled up for years, finally came to the fore. It was bizarre to reflect on my life with the new found knowledge that a virus I contracted from a blood transfusion was the likely cause of my severe and ineffable mental health issues over the years. It was upsetting to acknowledge that the best years of my life had been irredeemably tarnished.

88. For many years, I took a very old-fashioned view of mental health awareness as being for 'wusses'. I didn't understand those who championed the importance of looking after yourself in this way. I mocked those who talked openly of their struggles. I now realise the immense importance of mental health and discussing this subject openly and without taboo.

89. Following Yvonne's death, I was a wreck. I hated the world and everything in it. If I hadn't had Hepatitis C, I daresay I wouldn't have been like that, which was like fuel to the fire. It took me a while to appreciate the invaluable support from Marina. I realised I had an angel right before my eyes. We fell in love. I will never forget Yvonne, but I will learn to live without her.

90. My diagnosis also explained my mental health issues to those close to me. Marina has had to tolerate my irascible temper and volatile

behaviour. There were times when she didn't want to go out in public with me because she wouldn't know how I might behave. How Marina put up with me, I don't know.

91. For many years, I had told Marina that there was something not right with me. If I was helping her with the dishwasher, I'd have to give up very quickly due to back pain. At times she grew impatient, thinking I was making excuses and being lazy, particularly as she has rheumatoid arthritis and is in constant pain herself. She felt guilty when she realised that I wasn't just making up excuses and that I was really suffering.

92. In October 2015, I was compelled to leave my job as protection master due to poor health. I was in excruciating pain and had been for some time. My stomach was permanently in cramp. I was throwing up on the track and all I wanted to do was sleep.

93. I would later realise that this was the likely effects of Hepatitis C. I was very upset to leave my job as protection master. I was well-paid, well respected and enjoyed the role. I had good banter with my colleagues. From then on, I supported myself only with my savings from the sale of my home and the money from my late wife's life insurance.

94. I have only started to receive income again as of five weeks ago. My friend noticed an advert to look after a young boy with severe autism. I look after him for two days a week, six hours on each day. He is a lovely lad.

95. In 2021, shortly after my diagnosis, I began a three-month course of Epclusa which consisted of one tablet a day. I was monitored regularly. My viral load decreased until the virus became undetectable. I am also scheduled for a yearly check-up.

96. On 26 January 2022, Helen Hampton wrote to Dr G Croker confirming that my PCR was negative for HCV indicating a complete cure.

97. However, just last week, I began to experience the familiar pain in my stomach and back, albeit less intense, which persisted in the years preceding my diagnosis. I explained this to Helen who assured me that it is unlikely the virus would have returned. She has arranged an ultrasound nevertheless and I am due a fibro scan in April 2022. The story is far from over for me.

98. I was warned by GRO-A from the Hep C Trust that I might want to remain anonymous due to the stigma surrounding Hepatitis C. To this day, it is still conflated with intravenous drug use. While I appreciate that this might very well be true, I know that I have never taken drugs. The only realistic way that I could have been infected is through contaminated blood. Therefore, I feel I have nothing to be ashamed about.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

99. I find it very concerning that a consultant in the London/Essex area omitted to test me for Hepatitis C despite my symptoms and history of receiving blood during the 1980s. If I hadn't moved to Cornwall, I might still not know that I have Hepatitis C. I would have been left with the incorrect diagnosis of Macromastia Post-Colostomy Syndrome, whilst continuing to mask the pain with painkillers. Cornwall, on the other hand, have been nothing short of amazing.

100. After my diagnosis with Hepatitis C, I was offered counselling by my Hep C nurse, Helen. She explained that this could be provided through the NHS. It was also mentioned by the Hep C Trust. However, I opted against this.

101. My Hep C nurse is like a one-woman army. She has dedicated herself to raising awareness of the virus, visiting many GP practices in the South West to provide information. She requested permission to

use my name to bolster her campaign. However, she faces an immense challenge. There are still so many people who have never heard of the Infected Blood Inquiry.

102. In addition, HCV is still very much stigmatised. I can imagine that GP practices will be reluctant to implement her recommendations. Routine tests could save so many lives, yet I imagine that many practices will be reluctant to direct their resources in this way, particularly as the virus is still strongly conflated with drug use, and the beneficiaries of such tests often considered addicts.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

103. In 2021, I contacted the EIBSS who sent me the application forms in the post. The forms were very confusing. They demanded that applicants procure the help of a Hepatitis nurse and a GP, with a consultant in the event that a GP is not available. It was prohibitively difficult. They asked for 'supporting evidence', which was very vague both in the nature and extent of documentation required.

104. I phoned EIBSS to ask what exactly was required. They were very vague and only explained that I would have to prove that I was infected with HCV from contaminated blood on the balance of probabilities. I was left in the dark as to what documents I needed to provide. I was told by the Hep C Trust just this week that another gentleman's application was rejected. I dare say he probably hasn't given the detailed documentation evidence to the board.

105. I contacted the Hep C Trust who recommended that I obtain my hospital medical records (despite the fact that hospital records rarely go back beyond 10 years). I tried to get in touch with Harold Wood Hospital which no longer exists. I discovered the overarching Hospital Trust which now held responsibility for retainnig the records etc.

106. Citing the Freedom of Information Act, I contacted the Hospital Trust to request my records (again, something I was left to discover myself). At the same time, I was undergoing treatment for Hepatitis C and continuing to feel anxious as to whether it would be successful. The hospital contacted me to inform me that my records did not go back further than 10 years.

107. Charlotte Evans from Leigh Day advised that I send the letter I received from the Hospital regarding the unavailability of my records, to EIBSS. This letter, she said, would at least prove that I had made diligent efforts to access my records. By this point, I had moved from Basildon in Essex to Cornwall. My records were floating in no man's land.

108. It took me some time to get in touch with my former GP, who most likely pre-empted a potential negligence claim. After a litany of correspondences over the following weeks, eventually I spoke to a lady at my old doctor's surgery. She explained that the practice had moved to a different site and that it would take some time to search their archives, particularly during Covid. Yet without my records, my EIBSS would inevitably fail.

109. I explained my circumstances to the receptionists at my current GP's practice. They were helpful but couldn't do anything until the records arrived. At some point last year, I got a phone call to say that my records had arrived at the practice.

110. When I eventually obtained my medical records, I immediately noticed that they were incomplete. They were reasonably thorough at 106 pages, yet the crucial period of my treatment in 1985 was missing. This is despite the fact that the surgery and blood transfusions I received were the most important treatments I would undergo in my life.

111. As has been seen by the investigator, the handwritten GP Practitioner notes jump from 10 April 1984 to 1986. (The actual note is currently with EIBSS but I think the month it resumes is December) Why is there this gap in my notes? I believe any reference to my severe ankle injury has been removed, particularly as my records from then onwards continue on more thoroughly.

112. Overall, my experience with EIBSS has been awful. They offered no guidance or support. If it wasn't for the Hep C Trust, I would be completely on my own. It's bad enough that I was given this filthy blood which ruined my life. The Hep C Trust are a charity, yet they have been a pillar of support. At the same time, I appreciate that they are very busy and can't talk to me all day.

113. I did find one piece of paper, which appears to be a Discharge note. It reads. *Laceration to R leg. Tendon damage repaired* at Harold Hospital from 3/4 to 10 December 1985. It did not mention that I had a blood transfusion but at the very least, that I had received treatment at the Hospital (although a tendon repair belied the true nature and gravity of the intervention).

114. I contacted GRO-A from the Hep C Trust. She suggested that I request witness statements from those who witnessed the treatment. This amounted to an additional stress, as I was compelled to inform my dad, sister and brother in law that, unbeknownst to me, I had been carrying Hepatitis C for 37 years. I think the combination of documents just about secured my application. EIBSS agreed to pay me, but it was on a knife edge.

115. Helen said that it might be possible to look at the batch numbers to find out who gave me the infected blood. I've been through my medical files, and have found no information from Basildon Hospital about the operation or blood transfusion. If I didn't have the form mentioned previously, I don't think I would have been paid. That piece

of paper was gold. In fact it is fair to say that there are no ward – treatment notes detailing my time at Harold Wood Hospital.

116. At the time, my story was also being published in the Daily Telegraph and a local newspaper. I spoke to the Hep C Trust about inserting some articles as evidence. They advised against this. However, I ignored their advice. I had spoken at length, including on my podcast, about my infection with HCV from contaminated blood. It would be a huge affront to my integrity to lie about the source of my infection. I would be exposing myself to ridicule and judgment.

117. I was awarded a lump sum of £50,000, in addition to a monthly sum of £1,575 and a winter fuel allowance of £500, although the latter could cease at any point. However, if I divide the £50k between the 36 years that I was infected, on average I am receiving £1.3k for every year that I was infected. I would rather have the years back and be a young man in his prime; I am aware that the accident put paid to me running for Great Britain, however it was the HCV, which destroyed my physical and mental health.

118. I was then advised by the Hep C Trust to apply for the special category payment. EIBSS had recently broadened the eligibility requirements to include those afflicted with certain medical conditions possibly related to Hepatitis C infection. I had read it and thought it didn't apply to me and dismissed it. I believe they deliberately make their eligibility requirements prohibitively obscure.

119. I contacted GRO-A from the Hep C Trust to voice my frustration that none of the listed conditions applied to me. However, GRO-A assured me that I would also be eligible if I had suffered mental health issues as a result of my infection. Yet the form doesn't mention this. I applied. It takes roughly a month to receive a response. I have been waiting almost 28 days this Friday.

125. I will retain all my medical notes and make them available to the Infected Blood Inquiry for examination by independent medical professionals if so required.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 10/03/2022