Witness Name: Wendy Krusche
Statement No.: WITN7000001
Exhibits: **WITN7000002 - 006**
Dated: 10 February 2022

# INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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# WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WENDY KRUSCHE

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 11 January 2022.

I, Wendy Krusche, will say as follows: -

## Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Wendy Krusche. My date of birth is GRO-C 1952 and my address is GRO-C Essex GRO-C.

2. I am the Head of Careers at a local high school. I have worked in pastoral support and counselling and I have a master's degree in career management. I live with my long-term partner of 15 years. I have a son from my previous marriage.

3. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C ("HCV"). In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, my treatment and the impact that this infection has had on my life.

4. The anonymity process for the Inquiry has been explained to me. I do not wish for my statement to be anonymised, I would like my story to be heard with my name known.

5. I understand that if I am critical of any individual within my statement, that the person concerned has the right for the opportunity to answer such criticism and to know my identity. That said, as my statement is read it may be implied that I am criticising my clinician Dr GRO-D. I do not want my comments put to him.

## Section 2. How Infected

6. I moved to Melbourne, Australia, in 1975 with my former husband. I missed Christmas back home in the UK so I returned to see my family in December 1980. In early 1981 I discovered that I was pregnant and decided to stay in the UK to have my child.

7. I went into labour on GRO-C 1981 and was admitted to Rochford Hospital. It was a very difficult birth. I firstly had an epidural, followed by a caesarean section, for which I was given general anaesthetic.

8. During the caesarean operation the doctors noticed that I had a large dermoid cyst on my right ovary. The cyst was removed, and then the doctors noticed that my right ovary was still affected and the ovary was also removed.

9. The day after the operation, with my mum and sister present, I remember being told that I had lost a lot of blood. Incidentally this was on my birthday, GRO-C 1981. Whilst I was still drowsy and heavily sedated, I was asked by the doctors to sign a form, which I believe was a consent form. I signed the form but had no idea what I was consenting to. I firmly believe that this was consent for the blood transfusion that I had to replace the 900ml of blood that I lost during the caesarean/cyst & ovary removal procedure.

10. I enclose a document that was found by my ex-husband when I applied to EIBSS as exhibit **WITN7000002**. This document outlines the details of the operation performed during my childbirth and describes 'blood loss 900ml'. It does not specifically mention 'blood transfusion', however over one and a half pints of blood, in the condition that I was in, is a lot to lose without it being replaced. I was also anaemic prior to the birth of my son.

11. Following the birth of my son in 1981, I had moved back to Australia and I did not return to the UK until 2003. I began to feel progressively unwell in the years following. During this period, I had keyhole surgery for endometriosis in Melbourne. No blood transfusion was required. I have had no other medical procedures, in Australia or anywhere else, other than the UK.

12. My illness began with feeling incredibly tired and fatigued. This issue becoming increasingly debilitating for me. I had been used to having a lot of energy and I enjoyed doing things with my family. This changed around 1991 when I really began to 'hit a wall' with fatigue and exhaustion.

13. I complained of this fatigue to the doctors, who believed this was due to my anaemia. I was prescribed iron tablets, which had no effect on my exhaustion and fatigue, which gradually worsened. The true cause was not found

14. After returning to the UK in 2003, this condition persisted until eventually, at Christmas 2019, I collapsed in a supermarket.

15. My GP, Dr Doyle at Puzey Practice, Rochford, subsequently referred me to Dr Christina Zouvelou, a consultant haematologist at both Southend University Hospital and Spire Wellesley Hospital. Dr Zouvelou performed a number of tests on me to try and diagnose the cause of my fatigue. Initially she believed that I had too much iron in my blood.

16. I had a colonoscopy and endoscopy examinations, which produced no answers to my problem. I also had a CT scan which again showed no abnormalities. It was only after Dr Zouvelou performed a number of blood tests that I was referred to Dr GRO-D, a consultant gastroenterologist and hepatologist at GRO-D Hospital.

17. I enclose a letter from Dr GRO-D to Dr Zouvelou dated 19 March 2020 as exhibit **WITN7000003**. Dr GRO-D wrote that I 'may have got hepatitis C from a possible blood transfusion at the time of a complicated caesarean section back in 1981 at Rochford Hospital.' He added; 'She has no other risk factors for hepatitis C, never had tattoos, never used IV drugs and she lived in Australia for 30 years. There is no family history of note. She hardly drinks any alcohol. Her blood tests show that she has got hepatitis C genotype 1a and is probably cirrhotic with a platelet count of 81.

18. I attended my first appointment with Dr GRO-D in March 2020 where I was told that I had tested positive for HCV. This was a huge shock to me as I knew that HCV was associated with intravenous drug use. Dr GRO-D jokingly asked me if I had been injecting drugs. I do not think this was an example of him taking it lightly, more that it was a light-hearted bed side manner, as he knew I was not a drug user.

19. I was not given any information or leaflets about infection management control after my HCV diagnosis. I undertook most of this research myself through the internet and subsequently with the Hepatitis C Trust.

20. At this same consultation, Dr GRO-D asked me where I gave birth to my son. I explained that I gave birth to him at Rochford Hospital in 1981. Dr GRO-D then said 'that's strange' and explained that he had recently met with a friend of his who also gave birth at Rochford Hospital around the same time and who had recently tested positive for HCV.

21. Dr GRO-D concluded that I must have received a blood transfusion whilst giving birth to my son in 1981. This discussion made me reflect on my childbirth. Although I didn't remember any specific conversation about,

or mention of a blood transfusion, I just recalled signing the form and it being explained to me that I had lost a lot of blood.

22. Also at this appointment, Dr GRO-D said that there was treatment available that was highly successful. He discussed the possibility of me having liver scans to determine the extent of the damage to my liver caused by HCV.

23. Soon after this appointment in March 2020, the UK went into the first nationwide lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, I was unable to begin treatment to eradicate the HCV until October 2020. In this period, my skin became unbearably itchy. I suffered with terrible rashes on my arms and they bled from my constant scratching.

24. Dr GRO-D was both a private and NHS consultant. I contacted Dr GRO-D s private secretary GRO-D by email, enclosing a photo of the rashes and the bleeding. I asked her to forward this to Dr GRO-D and ask for his advice as to any medication or cream that I could use. I did not receive any form of acknowledgement or response to this email. I was left to suffer for months whilst waiting for my treatment to begin. I would like this to be noted as a criticism. This scratching has left scarring on my arms.

25. I eventually started a 3 month course of treatment in October 2020. This consisted of Harvoni tablets taken once daily. I did not experience any side-effects whatsoever during this treatment and I was able to carry on working.

26. I remember being told that the Harvoni medication was very expensive. The medication was delivered to me regularly by courier. It was important for the success of the treatment for me to be disciplined in taking the tablets and I was. I am normally hopeless with tablets but I managed to take this treatment absolutely as prescribed.

27. During the 3 month course of treatment, I don't recall being tested by the hospital to monitor my response to the Harvoni medication. I was tested after completing the treatment and was found to be clear of HCV.

28. I was tested again 6 months later and this again showed that I was HCV negative. I was tested recently and I was shown to remain clear of HCV.

29. Around January 2021, I had a Fibroscan on my liver which showed a score of 14.5. In a letter from Dr GRO-D dated 13 January 2021 (enclosed as exhibit **WITN7000004**), it was explained to me that this score 'is compatible with cirrhosis of the liver'.

30. I have never had a liver biopsy and this has never been mentioned to me. The damage to my liver is a significant worry for me. I wonder how severe the damage is having unknowingly lived with HCV for nearly 40 years. I remember asking Dr GRO-D if I needed a liver transplant but he said that, although it is damaged, it would be okay. I have no idea whether it is life-threatening or not. This is a constant concern for me.

## Section 3. Other Infections

31. I have no other infections as a result of receiving an infected blood transfusion.

## Section 4. Consent

32. As discussed, I had no idea what I was consenting to when signing the form after giving birth in GRO-C 1981. Nothing was explained to me and I was in no fit state to be able to give consent after such a serious operation. I did not receive a copy of this form.

33. Aside from this incident, I believe that I consented to all treatment and testing that I have received for my HCV infection.

## Section 5. Impact

34. After my diagnosis with HCV, I became self-conscious and ultra-aware of others around me. I was worried about transmitting the HCV to other people. I was obviously concerned about continuing to work at school. I spoke to the headmaster and two other members of the senior management team, all of whom were brilliant. They were understanding and supportive. However, somehow my status did become more widely known but I may have left some document on a desk which may have been seen by someone who then decided to tell others, I believe more from concern than gossip value. I honestly do not know but what I can say is that I have never suffered any negative comments, neither do I believe that I have been stigmatised as a result.

35. Although I have never experienced any stigma as a result of my HCV infection, I have felt wary and stigmatised in my own mind. I felt comfortable telling my friends and family and did not notice any change in their behaviour towards me. I do not believe that my ex-husband and my son, both of whom live in Australia, have been tested for HCV, although I am not aware of any problems. Neither has my current partner been tested and there are no issues.

36. I often experience brain fog and I continue to suffer with fatigue. I also have a constant pain in my right side, for which I am still seeing Dr GRO-D. Naturally, all of this continues to affect my family and social life.

37. Prior to my diagnosis, I was the head of sixth form at my local school. I was happy and working full-time, although I felt exhausted after work every day. After discussing my diagnosis with the headmaster, I moved to a part-time role as Head of Careers and I also work in pastoral support. This has understandably had significantly affected my income.

38. I believe that my exhaustion and fatigue over the years was the main factor in the break-up of my marriage. I felt awful most of the time and

this effected our intimacy. This was difficult for my ex-husband and we eventually divorced. We remain on friendly terms.

39. Two years before my HCV diagnosis, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I underwent 3 continual weeks of radiotherapy every day and had a lumpectomy operation. Thankfully this was successful and I am in remission, though I continue to take medication and will do so for the rest of my life. When the cancer first cropped up, I thought that I had finally found the cause of my fatigue and then with the treatment it masked the true cause, HCV. However, when I was diagnosed with HCV it all began to make sense.

40. I have spent in excess of £1000 in private medical fees to Dr GRO-D, regarding my HCV infection. After my diagnosis it seemed that my treatment was being delayed, possibly due to Covid 19. So, I saw Dr GRO-D in his capacity as a private consultant to get things underway. I even had a £240 invoice for a 30 minute Zoom meeting.

## Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

41. My treatment for HCV was delayed by the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. I was due to begin the 3 month course of Harvoni tablets in March 2020 when lockdown was announced, but I did not begin the course of treatment until October 2020.

42. I have a background in counselling and pastoral support. After my breast cancer diagnosis, I was sent to a counsellor who said quite honestly that I could probably counsel her. However, it did help to talk to someone even though I know a lot of coping skills from my training.

43. I have not been offered counselling or psychological support in connection with my HCV infection. I am unable to say whether or not it would have been beneficial, because it was never offered to me and so I never had the opportunity to assess its value to me. I would have definitely taken up any such offer.

44. When I applied to the English Infected Blood Support Scheme ("EIBSS"), the Hepatitis C Trust told me that I would probably be offered counselling, although this has not yet been mentioned to me.

## Section 7. Financial Assistance

45. Dr GRO-D, my consultant hepatologist, told me that I would be a good candidate to apply for a payment from EIBSS. He said that he had supported someone else's application and they had been successful.

46. I can't remember exactly whether Dr GRO-D gave me the form in the first instance or if I printed it off myself. However, I do know that it took Dr GRO-D a long time to complete the form on my behalf. When I returned for an appointment after leaving the form with Dr GRO-D, he said that he wasn't very good with computers. I then had to print another form out and leave it for Dr GRO-D to complete.

47. When I returned for my next appointment, he had still failed to finish the form. Dr GRO-D then said that he would sit down with me and complete the form together. Having told me to apply for EIBSS in March 2021, I did not submit my application until November 2021 as a result of this delay.

48. EIBSS responded to my application on 23 December 2021 stating that I hadn't provided sufficient evidence of having received a blood transfusion. I then contacted my GP and asked for my medical records.

49. I also requested my medical records from Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, under which Rochford Hospital falls. I received a response stating that my medical records had been destroyed 'in line with the trusts [sic] destruction policy' (exhibit **WITN7000005**).

50. I submitted my application to EIBSS in conjunction with two statements from my Mum, who is aged 93, and my sister. I also spoke to my ex-husband who found an old box full of letters and documents at home in

Australia. One of these documents was exhibit **WITN7000002** (referred to above), without which I don't think my application would have been accepted.

51. I received a response from EIBSS on 07 February 2022 confirming that my application had been 'provisionally approved' pending verification of Dr GRO-D's signature (exhibit **WITN7000006**). In this same email, I was informed that I would receive a one-off lump sum of £50,000 and regular monthly payments of £1,576, effective from November 2021. I will also receive a winter fuel payment. I would like to comment on a couple of things here; firstly, had Dr GRO-D been more diligent the payment would run from March 2021 and secondly again, had Dr GRO-D's office attended to his administrative tasks in a more timely manner, he would not have to be chased for confirmation of his signature on the application.

52. Jennifer Bainbridge, the assessor at EIBSS and author of this email, wrote that 'Part of our application process is to confirm that the signature on your application, is the signature of the doctor that has completed sections 5-9. We have tried on a number of occasions to contact Dr GRO-D's secretary to ask for this confirmation however, we have unfortunately not been able to get through to speak to anyone as of yet.'

53. I can only conclude that Dr GRO-D's (private, not NHS) secretary, GRO-D GRO-D, has neglected to respond to this request from EIBSS, which has caused a delay in my payment. I rang GRO-D the morning after receiving this letter to enquire why there was a delay in confirming the signature. Ms GRO-D told me that she refused to acknowledge the signature as I was not a private patient, which is strange considering I had paid for consultations, and forwarded the request to Dr GRO-D's NHS assistant Natasha Hughes. I tried to contact Natasha Hughes and left a voice mail. I also obtained her email address and got an out of office reply to my email. This was only on February 8, 2 days ago and she may be on holiday, so I will leave it a while longer before trying again.

54. The Inquiry investigator has drawn my attention to my application to EIBSS being only for a 'Stage 1' payment. I did not understand what was meant by that. It was explained to me that 'Stage 1' was for the HCV and that there was also a 'Stage 2' payment for those claimants that had serious liver damage, such as cirrhosis. This had never been explained to me. I now intend to follow that up but I foresee similar delays as I try to get the application through via Dr GRO-D again.

## Section 8. Other Issues

55. I have received incredible support from the Hepatitis C Trust and I am grateful to them for all their help and advice.

56. I am also grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Inquiry and give my statement. Talking to the Inquiry team members yesterday and today, has made me feel that I am clarifying things in my own mind and has helped me to process the reasons why I feel upset and angry about what has happened to me.

## Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 10-2-2022