Witness Name: Sara Jane Sadler
Statement No: WITN3332001
Exhibits: None
Dated: 17th may 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SARAH JANE SADLER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 7 March 2022.

I, Sarah Jane Sadler, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sarah Jane Sadler. My date of birth is GRO-C 1956. I reside in Norfolk and full details of my address are known to the Inquiry. I live with my partner, Steven, and I have 2 children from a previous relationship. I retired in October 2021. Prior to this, I was employed at Steven's printing company based in Cromer, Norfolk.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV") after having a blood transfusion following the birth of my child. In particular, the nature of how I had learnt about my infection, how my illness had affected me and my family thereafter, and the financial assistance I have received.

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. I do not wish to be anonymous as I wish for my story to be known in full.

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

5. I have constructed this statement with access to my medical records.

Section 2. How Infected

6. I was born in GRO-C and have one sister. I moved to Berkshire in or around 1978 for work. I first moved to GRO-C in Berkshire where I was working for a printing company. I met my ex-husband and we married in 1989.

7. We moved to GRO-C and had our first child at the end of 1989 at The Royal Berkshire Hospital In Reading. There were complications with the birth, during which I started bleeding and had to have a caesarean. I was given 2 units of blood as a result.

8. Two weeks after giving birth to my son, I came out in a rash all over my body. My doctor put it down to the stress of the birth, but personally I think this was my body reacting to the infected blood I had been given.

9. I had my second child in 1992 in the same hospital. It was another difficult birth. Following the delivery of my daughter by caesarean, I then had a hysterectomy and was given 6 units of blood. Following this blood transfusion, I didn't get a rash or other reaction.

10. After the birth of my children, I know my personality changed. I was always tired and angry. It felt different. I always thought that this was down to having two young children and working. I went to the doctors to explain that I was

always tired. They gave me iron tablets and undertook blood tests but nothing adverse came from these tests. At no stage was I asked about my past in terms of blood transfusions.

11. My marriage broke down as a result of my changes in character and I moved back to GRO-C in or around 1996.

12. My tiredness was getting progressively worse. Now I put it down to my marriage break up, along with looking after my two children and working. I had my family around me but it was still hard. I used to go running, and whilst I could run to a certain extent, however there was a point that I couldn't get any further. I once ran a half marathon and it almost killed me. My running ability dwindled after that. It was definitely fatigue that caused this.

13. I have definitely suffered from brain fog. There was also a feeling of being overwhelmed by everything and I had moments of borderline depression.

14. My sister was quite concerned at some points as I would get quite emotional at times. She suggested I go to the doctors for antidepressants. At the time, I said I wanted to be clear headed in order to look after my children.

15. When I went to the doctors after this, they offered me antidepressants which I declined. Counselling was offered to me but that wasn't very helpful and didn't work very well and was really quite ineffective. At no stage was it suggested I provide blood samples for analysis. All that was suggested were iron tablets and sleep.

16. In 1998, I gave blood for the first time since having my children. I subsequently got quite a few letters from the donation centre which said that they had found something in my blood and asked me to give them a call. At this stage I was told that they had found HCV in my blood and suggested going to the doctors. I had no idea what HCV was until I undertook my own research.

17. The donation centre informed me that they had checked the two units I received from my blood transfusion following the birth of my first child in 1989. They said that one of the units was clear but the other could not be checked because the donor had died. The presumption was this was potentially infected blood and it was more than likely where the infection had come from. They didn't tell me whether or not the blood had been imported.

18. The fact that they admitted this suggests that they probably knew a lot more about infected blood than they told me. I didn't know how to feel, I just kept questioning how this could have been allowed to happen.

19. I had put my life into the hands of the NHS; yet had I not had the blood transfusion, I probably would have died anyway, but they're meant to be there to help you. By doing so, they've infected me with something that would affect me for the rest of my life.

20. Around February/March 1999, I went to see my doctor. The doctor asked me a lot of personal questions including whether I used needles and had been an intravenous drug user, whether I had any tattoos, where I had travelled and whether I have had led a promiscuous lifestyle. My response to all these questions was no. The possibility of the blood itself being contaminated was never mentioned to me. The whole situation made me feel very anxious.

21. The questions asked of me came across in quite an accusatory manner. It made me feel guilty that I had done something wrong. It made me think about my past life and what I could have done or where I could have contracted HCV from.

22. Following this meeting, I went back home and started my own research. This is when I discovered that blood products had been important from the USA and blood was not being screened for HIV, AIDS or HCV. It occurred to me

how thankful I was that I had not contracted HIV or AIDS as a result of being given infected blood.

23. When I got my diagnosis, it was a massive shock. Initially I thought it might be a matter of just taking antibiotics and I'd cured. I didn't realise just how debilitating it would be. In fact I was quite scared. I'd had HCV for 10 years before I knew anything about it. I just cannot believe that the blood wasn't screened.

24. In September 1999, my doctor made an appointment for me to see a specialist at the gastro clinic in Cromer. The doctor there, Dr Kennedy was really nice, he told me exactly what HCV was and how I might have contracted it. He was the first doctor that admitted to me that it could have been due to contaminated blood products.

25. Dr Kennedy told me not to share toothbrushes, to have protected sex and be careful of cutting myself. I didn't receive any more advice on this. I had to undertake my own research about things that I could and couldn't do. I think the advice from Dr Kennedy was insufficient.

26. I met my partner, Steven, in 2000. We are not married but have been together now for 21 years. My daughter, Jessica, works for Steven's printing company. Steven has been in the printing business since the 1980s. He owns the general town printers in Cromer.

27. I remember being really concerned about passing on my HCV to Steven by saliva. I was also very wary of passing it on to my children. GRO-C GRO-C GRO-C

28. A week after I met Steven, I had to tell him about my infection. I remember being so scared that he wouldn't want anything further to do with me.

Section 3. Other Infections.

29. As far as I am aware, I haven't been infected with anything else.

Section 4. Consent

30. When I received the blood transfusion, it was an emergency scenario, so consent wasn't really a consideration.

31. Even if I wasn't asked beforehand, I think they should have told me about the risks afterwards. Had the potential risks been known, I could have found out about the infection 10 years earlier or some time in between.

32. I think there was definitely an element of concealment. Even when I was going to the doctor, he made no connection to blood products I'd been supplied with.

Section 5. Impact.

33. Had I not had HCV, I don't think that my marriage would have broken up. I think all my symptoms of HCV were hugely contributory factors leading to the breakdown. I can't say for sure, but my personality had changed so drastically that it had a major impact on the relationship.

34. My ex-husband was a musician, so we'd be going out quite late at night. He ended up going out on his own instead because I was always too tired. He had his own recording studio, so he would work all day, come home to have dinner with the children and then go back out again until 1-2am. So even back then, I was bringing up the children on my own. I think we just grew apart.

35. Dr Kennedy suggested trying a course of treatment to eradicate my HCV. I had two liver biopsies, firstly in February 2001 and the other in May 2004. These showed mild fibrosis.

36. In 2004, I started my treatment. I had ribavirin and interferon and was on this for a year. Thankfully, it was successful. I had blood tests every year, following the success until 2013. In 2013 I was declared Hepatitis undetected. I haven't had any fibroscans since 2013 either.

37. The treatment was horrible. I took my injections every Friday, the weekends were always wiped out. I used to dread every Friday, I hated injecting myself as I knew I was injecting myself with something that made me feel terrible. However, I was determined to eradicate the HCV.

38. The treatment affected our personal relationship for a year and affected my children quite a bit as they were sad to see me go through it. They were about 9 and 12 years of age at this point.

39. In terms of physical effects from the treatment, I lost about two stone in weight and my hair started to fall out. If it hadn't been for Steven, I wouldn't have been able to get through it. I was so tired and so emotional throughout.

40. Once I had an injection, I would feel sick for days. The day immediately after the injection would be spent in bed with headaches. My body ached all over. It aged me by about 10 years. I had quite severe depression as well.

41. It was essentially a year out of my life that I don't really want to remember. By this time, I was doing the bookkeeping for Steven which I managed to continue with because I was working part time, around 16 hours a week and sat down for most of it.

42. In the 10 years pre-diagnosis, I felt like a fraud. I thought I might just be a hypochondriac. I wondered whether I just imagined the tiredness and feeling generally unwell. I must have had blood tests, but these would have been for anaemia rather than HCV.

43. I had a feeling there was something else, but I just didn't know what it was. In the end, I just gave up going to the doctors. I tried yoga and various herbal remedies to try to help myself but nothing seemed to work.

44. When I finally got a diagnosis, I almost felt relieved because I had been right and I could actually do something about it. But all those 10 years, I worried about whether I'd infected someone else and what effect had it had on my liver. I wasn't sure if I was going to die.

45. I told my immediate family and Steven about my infection. I think we also told Steven's family. But as far as friends were concerned, I only told my best friend, Lisa. She is a nurse, so she understood. She helped quite a lot and was very pragmatic about it; she was sensible and supportive.

46. I wouldn't say that I lost any friends because of my HCV infection. It was still early days in GRO-C when I was diagnosed. Most of my friends were through my children from school. I had a nice group of friends and didn't tell anyone at the time.

47. I finally told my friends when I was going through treatment in 2004. They were also very supportive but I always had to explain how I got it. They were all very shocked, but equally lovely to me and remained loyal.

48. I was always very cautious about telling people in such a small community about my HCV infection. You never really know who's talking to who and who knows what. I was always worried about going somewhere new for the first time and having to tell them about my HCV, for instance going to get a facial. I never knew how they were going to react.

49. The stigma of the infection made me feel unclean and therefore reticent to tell anyone. Telling Steven was one of the worst things I had to do. I just felt horrible about myself and didn't like myself at all. It made me very depressed.

I felt like I couldn't get close to people and worried that I would pass it on to somebody. I always told Steven not to touch my things.

50. When I told the dentist, I observed a big sticker on my notes that said in big red letters something on the lines of 'beware.' It was just another hurdle of dread going in there each time, knowing I had contaminated blood. I don't think I ever told the dentist that I had contracted HCV via contaminated blood, I just said I had the infection so they probably made up their own mind as to how I had contracted it.

51. Thinking about it, my dentist appointments were always in the afternoons. It wasn't specifically mentioned to me that I would have to wait until the end of the day. Looking back now this was probably due to my HCV status

52. Every time I went for a blood test, it would say 'contaminated specimen' on the tubes. I would see doctors and nurses instantly put a pair of gloves on.

53. GRO-C

54. GRO-C

55. In terms of my son, James, I think that the fact he didn't have a father figure growing up has taken its toll on him. He would have been about 5-6 years old when we moved to GRO-C I think he found it difficult making new friends, but he did make some good friends.

56. He's not very sure of his own path in life. He tried so many different things but he didn't really know what to do. He's now 32, but he's only just qualified as a teacher. I think he was a bit lost. I think he was searching for something and didn't really know what to do. Through lockdown, he was studying from home which I think he found quite difficult. He has a lovely girlfriend who he lives with in Leeds. However, I think my HCV infection has been very difficult for him to deal with and had a profound effect upon him.

57. I feel guilty it was my fault that we moved from Wokingham and took them both away from everything that they knew and had to start again. I am glad to say they have grown into wonderful adults.

58. To date, I have experienced no financial implications as a result of my HCV infection. I have mentioned it on insurance documents a couple of times, but nothing has had an impact.

59. I remember once saying to someone that having HCV felt like a bereavement. I feel like I've lost a part of my life that I will never get back again. I feel bereaved for the person I could have been; the way that this had affected my life and how different it could have been and of course my children and their lives.

60. I just feel like I have lost a big chunk of my life and I just hope now that I'm not too old to carry on doing things. At the moment, I'm now in a position where my children are happy, my health is under control, I am starting up again at yoga, I am thinking about going travelling again with Steven.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

61. In 2005, I was diagnosed with Hypothyroidism. This is an overactive thyroid gland and a likely result of the HCV treatment. It affects my immune system.

62. At the time of the treatment, they didn't tell me that I was effectively receiving a cancer drug to treat my HCV, but I found out from my own research. Thankfully, my hypothyroidism has stopped now and has been resolved. I am not on medication for this anymore.

63. In 2007, I was diagnosed with stage 3 chronic kidney disease. I think they said this was a result of the treatment too. When I was diagnosed, I didn't want to know what it was all about. I didn't want to keep going to the hospital, so in a way I have basically ignored it. Now I have accepted it, they are monitoring it.

64. In 2015, I developed atrial fibrillation. I was in hospital and on medication for a few months. I haven't had any issues since. This might have been a result of the treatment. Thankfully, this resolved was by itself but it did definitely occur out of the blue.

65. In 2016, I developed rheumatoid arthritis. This took about a year to get diagnosed. The doctors tried me on lots and lots of different drugs. I ended up going privately at the Spire, I paid for myself to go and then they finally diagnosed me with rheumatoid arthritis. Nobody in my family had it as it is normally hereditary. I assumed it was as a result of the HCV treatment.

66. Impact wise, during Covid I had to be very careful. My immune system was extremely vulnerable so I fell into the extremely vulnerable category. I had Covid about 6 weeks ago but luckily I was ok.

67. In 2018 I was on antidepressants for a while. When I got rheumatoid arthritis, I had to fill out forms about HCV and it threw up a lot of thoughts and feelings about it which made me quite depressed. I had suicidal thoughts, thoughts of

'who would miss me, what's the point in being here.' It is not something that I would go through with, but the thoughts were definitely there.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

68. I applied to the Skipton Fund and had a phone call with them. I think they must have spoken to the doctor because they said something along the lines that because they couldn't test one of the blood samples, they would just accept this was how I was infected. My application was accepted and I was given a £20,000 stage 1 payment.

69. In 2016 I received a further £3,600 from EIBSS. Now I get a monthly payment.

70. I also recall getting a letter from EIBSS asking if I had any of a number of illnesses, one of which was rheumatoid arthritis. I had to fill out another form and get the GP sign this. EIBSS viewed this as another stage because they considered it as a result of the treatment. I was given further financial assistance as a result.

Section 8. Other Issues

71. If it had been brought to light earlier and if we had been told there was a chance that the blood had been contaminated, then those who have died could still be alive.

72. It would have saved so many lives and so much heartache. If I hadn't gone to give blood, I never would have known. At no point would a doctor have suggested a HCV test.

73. I think it is abominable that there was this possibility. Almost like playing Russian roulette with peoples' lives and the lives of their family and those around them.

74. This is why I didn't join any groups to discuss it. I wanted to be around normal people and really bury my head in the sand.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 17. 5. 22