

Statement No. **WITN3360001**

Exhibits: **WITN3360002 - WITN3360003**

Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MIREILLE DARRAS**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 22 July 2019.

I, **MIREILLE DARRAS**, will say as follows:-

#### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 My name is Mireille Darras and my date of birth is **GRO-C** 1956. My address is known to the Inquiry. I have two adult daughters and a son and am employed as a teacher for children with special educational needs.
- 1.2 I was infected with Hepatitis C through a blood transfusion received in 1980 after the birth of my second daughter. In my statement I intend to speak about how I was infected, the nature of my illness in particular, the impact it has had, not only on my life, but on that of my family too.

## SECTION 2: HOW INFECTED

2.1 I moved to **GRO-C** London in 1976. My two daughters were born in 1977 and 1980 respectively and my son in 1986.

2.2 My second daughter was born at the Queen Charlotte Hospital and **GRO-C**

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The day after her birth, I felt very weak and felt I couldn't even stand up without assistance. I was told that I had lost a lot of blood during the delivery and that I needed a blood transfusion. I was happy to receive the blood transfusion as I had felt so weak that I fell to my knees when I had tried to go to the toilet on my own. I don't remember being given any advice about the risk of infection but I don't think that I was particularly worried. I trusted the doctors and didn't question their decision to give me a blood transfusion at that time, in fact I was grateful for it. As I recall it, I received three bags of blood on that occasion and felt much better for it.

## SECTION 3: OTHER INFECTIONS

3.1 To the best of my knowledge I have not contracted any other infections as a result of receiving the contaminated blood transfusion.

## SECTION 4: CONSENT

4.1 Although I was unaware of the fact that my doctor would be testing for Hepatitis C, I am glad that he did and that I was able to receive treatment even though it was decades after I had contracted the virus. My only regret was that I not suffered any symptoms earlier and therefore was not tested sooner, before my liver had deteriorated to the point of cirrhosis.

## SECTION 5: TREATMENT/CARE/SUPPORT

- 5.1 I was initially told by the laboratory which tested my blood that I had contracted Hep C in 2017. I consulted my doctor who recommended that I go for a liver scan. I have not had a liver biopsy. The results of the liver scan showed that the level of damage caused by the Hepatitis C virus was F4 which means that my liver is cirrhotic. My doctor did not explain this to me – I established this by googling it online.
- 5.2 I was referred to a specialist who told me about a new treatment to get rid of the Hep C virus called Epclusa. He told me that, unlike earlier treatments, this one had no side effects and if I took it once a day, I would be fine in three months. I believed him and felt much better. I started the treatment in December 2017 as prescribed and after three months returned for a blood test which showed I am now Hep C free.
- 5.3 The fact that my liver has cirrhosis is more worrying as that can't be fixed. I find the idea of a liver transplant utterly terrifying. I will only have one if I absolutely need one in time. My last liver scan was in September this year. Although my cirrhosis is not bad, it is still cirrhosis which I wouldn't have had had it not been for the contaminated blood transfusion, and I know the situation can evolve at any time.

## **SECTION 6: IMPACT**

- 6.1 My story is not a long one because for most of my life I didn't know I was ill. I was oblivious to the fact that I had contracted Hepatitis C as I had no symptoms until approximately two years ago.
- 6.2 In September 2017 I was feeling constantly tired and run down, it almost felt as though I had the flu that just wouldn't go away. I had been taking very strong medication for acidity in my stomach and I thought that it was this treatment that was making me feel so unwell. I knew something was not right so I went to see my doctor who did blood tests as he also thought it was perhaps this medication that was making me feel dreadful.

- 6.3 I continued to feel worse and worse so returned to my doctor who sent off more blood for testing. I wasn't sure what they were testing for but it didn't occur to me that they may be testing for Hepatitis C. Although the test results could usually have been sent to me, I received a phone call from my doctor to ask that I come into his office instead. I felt that there was something wrong.
- 6.4 It was at this appointment that the doctor told me that I was infected with Hepatitis C. My first thought was that this was strange as I didn't feel that bad. When he asked me where I may have got it from, I had no idea. He then asked if I had ever had a blood transfusion and when I said that I had but that it was many decades before, he explained that this would be where I contracted HCV.
- 6.5 I feel that I have been fortunate in that I have not suffered severe symptoms as a result of my Hepatitis infection. As described above, I felt tired and rundown, as if I had the flu. It did not prevent me from going to work each day, although this was difficult. The treatment that I received to cure me of the Hep C virus is a fairly new one and I feel lucky to have received such a safe treatment with no side effects. I have read about the previous treatments and for some people it seems to me that the treatment to cure the virus was worse than the Hep C itself.
- 6.6 At first it was a huge shock for my daughters and the rest of my family. They were very worried because they did not know much about Hepatitis C except that it was a bad thing. Once I had told them about the treatment, they felt a lot better however a lot of people don't see me as ill and they forget that I live with the consequence of the Hep C infection.
- 6.7 I feel as if the impact of having received this virus from a contaminated blood transfusion has been more psychological than physical in my case. Hepatitis C is one thing to have but cirrhosis is much worse because once you have it,

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you have it for life. There is no pill to cure it and I know that I will live with it forever.

6.8 I feel that there is still a stigma surrounding Hepatitis C and cirrhosis; in fact with the later, people immediately think that you are an alcoholic. I have not told my colleagues at work that I was treated for Hep C because I feel that it is private.

6.9 My illness has not made much of a difference to my private, family and social life. I just have to be more careful and although I enjoy wine, I can only drink one glass very occasionally.

## **SECTION 7: FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

7.1 I was unaware of the Inquiry until about six months ago when one of my daughters, who lives in England, sent me a link to the Inquiry website. I then got in touch with the Inquiry. I was told by Inquiry staff about the EIBSS. They were very helpful and told me how to make my claim which I did. They also told me that I could possibly get compensation.

7.2 Until that moment, I did not know that there was any compensation or financial assistance available to people like me who had contracted Hep C through contaminated blood transfusions.

7.3 I wrote to the EIBSS, and they requested that I get my medical records from Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London. Initially I was told that they could not trace any of my records. I had forgotten that after my first daughter was born I went yellow. I suffered from jaundice or Hep A and this worried me and made me insist on them giving me my records as I thought it may look as if I now had the same disease. After numerous emails back and forth with them and yet more forms, they finally sent me my medical records. I have included some of the correspondence exchanged with the hospital as part of this statement to show what a struggle it was to obtain my medical records. I

have read that a lot of people have battled to obtain their medical records so I am really happy that I persisted and eventually got mine. WITN3360002

- 7.4 Once I had received all the documentation necessary, I applied for compensation from the EIBSS and on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019 I received a letter from them confirming that both my Stage 1 and Stage 2 support applications have been approved. At this stage I am awaiting payment. I have included this email as part of my statement. WITN3360003

## SECTION 8: OTHER ISSUES

- 8.1 I hope that this Inquiry helps prevent something like this ever happening again and that everything that went on comes out into the open. If things are hidden, they can be repeated. Personally, I want to know how long the NHS knew about it and how long it was before they did something about it. I want it to bring some comfort to the people who have been affected. Money won't be compensation for people who are ill or who have lost a family member – for some it is too late and that is terrible. But at least it is something to help them cope with the situation.
- 8.2 To many people my life may seem very normal. They do not know that I have a secret, that my liver is sick. They do not know that every time I feel unwell, I worry it is my liver. It is a black cloud that will be with me for the rest of my life. I really hope that the Inquiry is a success so that people who have died from contaminated blood can be recognised. I want it to make a lot of noise so that the public are aware of this horrific scandal. My hope is that if the UK Inquiry is successful then other countries may hold inquiries too and they can start to give their people answers as I am sure this has happened in a lot of countries. I feel that if people can get away with this then they can get away with other crimes. It is disgusting that this was done for financial gain, this is murder. I have also learned that the NHS was aware of the blood being tainted but kept quiet about it for many years, and this is absolutely unacceptable. The NHS is

an institution people need to trust, you don't expect them to kill people. If you can't trust them then who can you trust.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

09/04/2021