Witness Name: Keith Bennett
Statement No.: WITN3559001
Exhibits: **WITN3559002 - 009**
Dated: 11/10/2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KEITH BENNETT

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 30 July 2019.

I, Keith Bennett, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Keith Bennett. My date of birth is GRO-C 1956, and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am divorced with three children and I am living with my partner. I am in full time employment. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C by blood transfusion. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me.

2. I confirm that I have decided not to have a legal representative and that I am happy to provide the Inquiry team with a written statement.

Section 2. How Infected

3. I had a metallic aortic valve replacement in 1988. The reason I had this was because earlier in the year I had had a minor operation at Medway Maritime Hospital and I experienced a rigor. I was discharged from hospital feeling unwell and about ten days later I was rushed into Bart's Hospital Rochester on blues and twos. I was immediately put on Gentamicin and Ampicillin antibiotics. That continued for about a fortnight during which time I was diagnosed with sub-bacterial endocarditis by the resident cardiologist, Dr Thompson. The bacteria in my blood caused damage to my aortic valve, my original equipment so to say.

4. I then attended St Thomas' Hospital, London for an echocardiogram. After the results came in, they detailed me to have the aortic valve replacement. I had the procedure about two months later in the Brook General Hospital in Woolwich. Mr O'Riordon was the consultant surgeon and carried out the operation of the replacement heart valve.

5. During the time of the surgery I was on life support and I believe that's when the blood transfusion took place. I was then in intensive care for probably twenty-four hours observation. I was then put on the ward and I believe I left ten days later to recuperate at home. I think I was off work for about ten weeks in total.

6. I don't have any further details of the transfusion or how much I was given. The Brook Hospital has gone and Mr O'Riordon has retired. I was invited back to the Brook Hospital after I had the operation to observe the operation being done on someone else. I did attend and noted that blood was given to the patient having the exact same operation as me.

7. The aortic valve replacement operation is the only time I have had a blood transfusion.

8. I was not informed of any risks of infection prior to the transfusion. I was out of it on a life support machine at the time it was given.

9. Following the aortic valve replacement, I attended the Cardiology Department at Maidstone Hospital and had echocardiograms. I produce a letter from Dr Ali in the Cardiology Department as **EXHIBIT WITN3559002**. The letter is addressed to Dr GRO-D who is the senior General Practitioner (GP) at GRO-D.

10. I have to take drugs because of the heart valve replacement. I have been taking Warfarin 10mg daily since straight after the operation. The only thing I need to do is to go in every six weeks and they do an INR check which is to check the ability of the blood to clot and the time it takes. They take a prick of blood and put it on the tape to put in the machine. So, there are no syringes involved or anything like that.

11. In 2018, for probably about a year, the GP surgery were taking blood samples from my arm by syringe. My GP is Dr GRO-D at GRO-D GRO-D. Dr GRO-D asked me about how much alcohol I was drinking and seemed to be concerned with my alcohol intake. I thought he was taking more blood samples to assess the levels of alcohol in my system. As far as I and my family were concerned, my alcohol intake was normal. I have never smoked. I think Dr GRO-D thought I was lying about how much alcohol I drank.

12. I have no idea what prompted the blood tests. I have normal things like coughs and colds, but I normally don't need to go to the doctor. Generally I only take Warfarin (10mg daily) and Perindopril (6mg Daily) as well because my blood pressure was slightly high but that's all managed now.

13. I don't know if GPs have been instructed to carry out additional blood tests in the last year or two. I suppose they have updates and circulars and so forth. Maybe he realised then that I fell within the scope of people possibly having Hepatitis C.

14. I've since spoken with the nurses at the 'hep' clinic in Maidstone and they've expanded that once the GPs have seen 'normal' people who may have Hepatitis C, they're moving on to people who have taken drugs and may have Hepatitis C risk on their records, I believe that's the next step.

15. They initially didn't say specifically what they were looking for in the blood tests. I thought Dr GRO-D thought I may have been consuming too much alcohol. Because I didn't know about Hepatitis C or anything like that, my opinion was that it could only be the alcohol they were testing for. I was then told I would be tested for Hepatitis C by my GP.

16. In December 2018 I had an appointment with Dr GRO-D and that's when he told me he had a suspicion that I had Hepatitis C. Dr GRO-D gave me an information leaflet about Hepatitis C which I produce as **EXHIBIT WITN3359003**. He didn't go through the whole leaflet but he did point out that Hepatitis C is a modern illness and that diagnosis of Hepatitis C and treatment was developed in the mid 1990s.

17. Dr GRO-D didn't give me any lifestyle advice or advice about infecting others. However, I asked the question because I've got children and grandchildren. The children were born before the operation so there was no risk to them but I asked the questions about if it is transferable and how it is transferable. I think the answer came back that it was either via blood or bodily fluids which then frightened me with regards to having children and eight grandchildren. I was thinking, can I pick them up? Can I go near them?

18. I questioned him about how I got Hepatitis C and he said he wasn't sure. He questioned me about my lifestyle. He asked if I had had any relationships with men, if I had taken any drugs and if I had ever used needles. He didn't explore any of the other ways you could be infected by Hepatitis C. He said there was a possibility it could have been when I had the heart replacement valve surgery but he didn't expand on that.

19. It was quite a lengthy conversation I had with him. I am not one to not ask questions when something like this comes up. At the time I didn't realise the enormity of it.

20. Dr GRO-D referred me to the hepatology clinic at Maidstone Hospital. I produce the letter from Dr GRO-D advising he had referred me, dated 12 December 2018, as **EXHIBIT WITN3559004**.

21. I attended the 'hep' clinic, as they call it, on 3 January 2019 and saw Dr Bird, who is the Consultant in the Hepatology Department. Dr Bird examined me and at that time it was just a chat, a talk about my previous medical history which I'm sure he had copies of.

22. Dr Bird said they wanted to put me on a programme of new drugs because of the Hepatitis C. The name of the treatment wasn't discussed at that point, I was just told I would be given treatment. They took some blood samples then and the programme to be put into place was to be confirmed after the results of those samples came back. I was scheduled to have a Fibroscan and also an MRI scan on my abdomen. A copy of the letter from Dr Bird to Dr GRO-D following my appointment, dated 22 January 2019, is produced at Exhibit **WITN3559005.**

Section 3. Other Infections

23. I do not have any other infections, as far as I am aware. I don't even know if they've tested me for other infections.

Section 4. Consent

24. I was told I would be tested for Hepatitis C by my GP. I consented to the appointment with Dr Bird and I consented to the treatment for Hepatitis C. I am not aware of any other tests or treatments carried out on me.

Section 5. Impact

25. I felt sick when I found out I had Hepatitis C, I was very shocked. My first question to Dr GRO-D was whether it was related to HIV and he said "No". That's when I started asking questions about if it was transferable and if my family had to be checked. I think my questions rocked him back a bit, because I was so shocked.

26. After my appointment with Dr Bird in January 2019 what followed on was to have a liver Fibroscan. I produce as Exhibits **WITN3559006** and **WITN3559007** letters from Beverley Clark, Clinical Nurse Specialist in the Hepatology Department, dated 12 February 2019 stating the Fibroscan gave a result of 12.4 Kpa which indicates possible fibrosis. I also produce an information leaflet about Liver Fibroscans at Exhibit **WITN3559008**.

27. One of the things that came out of my questions to Dr Kendrew is that I now understand that I'm now more susceptible to liver cancer. As far as I know I haven't been tested for that. I have an appointment with Dr Bird in the Hepatology Department coming up on 29 August and I presume they may take bloods and run tests then.

28. Looking back to the aortic valve replacement, after the operation I had felt that I was possibly in a worse position to most people walking down the street. I lacked confidence after the operation about what I could do. Prior to the operation I had trained twice a week and played rugby but I didn't know if I could even run for the bus after the operation. Mr O'Riordon used to lecture to the army on major trauma surgery at hospitals in the field of combat at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, London (QEH). The army were running a course at the QEH where they had various members of the army who had suffered with coronary problems and they put them on a three-week course of exercise and good eating. Mr O'Riordon put me on that course and on

the last day I ran three miles in 18 minutes, swam a mile in 50 minutes and did a 17-mile cycle ride in the afternoon.

29. It gave me the confidence to carry on achieving in my career and with my family. I couldn't go back to playing rugby because of taking Warfarin. You can't be in a situation where you get bad bruising because the first place the clots will move to is to the foreign body in you, the metallic valve, and that would be curtains for me.

30. As far as possible I carried on with a normal life after the operation. Looking back, mentally and physically I thought I was normal. I can't put my finger on any one situation that I could now attribute to Hepatitis C, not as a lay person in terms of my mental and physical experience.

31. I've racked my brain as to whether I had any further medical complications after the operation/transfusion and I can't say that there's anything specific although there could be an underlying process, which has perhaps been masked by the fact I have to take Warfarin and I don't get in to situations where I become ill. I suppose you could say that I've led my life in moderation, no excesses or anything.

32. Since I found out about the Hepatitis C I don't think there have been any medical complications, or if there has I don't think I've noticed it. It was just the shock of knowing I was suffering from something that could have been there a for a long, long time.

33. I received oral treatment for the Hepatitis C, a drug named Epclusa. They were tablets, one tablet a day and the tablets were big ones, like horse pills. I was on the treatment for 3 months and started taking it in March 2019. I produce at Exhibit **WITN3559009** a letter from Jayne Avards, Clinical Nurse Specialist in the Gastroenterology Department, advising my GP practice of my treatment programme.

34. I didn't have any difficulties accessing the treatment. Dr Bird did say during my appointment in January 2019 that the treatment was very expensive and that we had to have approval of the plan. Dr Bird also

said that they had developed alternative drugs to the injections which I understand weren't very nice.

35. They set up a special clinic in Maidstone for people having the treatment. Maidstone Hospital have been very good, the nurses have explained everything very well and monitored things. I haven't seen Dr Bird since the first examination in January 2019, my appointments since have always been with the nurses who work for him.

36. One of the nurses at the hospital told me that my levels have gone down and that was when my appointment for 29 August 2019 was made. Apparently, it's quite a complicated formula on the test results but as far as they're concerned the three months' treatment has had an effect and reduced the levels to normal. Am I cured? I don't know. I can only assume they'll take more bloods and run tests at the appointment on 29 August.

37. I have headaches since being on the treatment. I had never suffered headaches before. As far as I know that was the only side effect of the treatment.

38. I have not disclosed my infection to other medical professionals, for example dentists, but I suppose I would need to let them know.

39. I didn't tell my immediate family about the infection. I felt I was stigmatised and that nothing was absolutely clear and concise at that time. I didn't know whether to approach people at work and generally I suppose you could say for a short period of time I took a step back from my normal routines.

40. I did tell my Partner. Her reaction was that she was shocked. She actually works in a doctor's surgery and dispenses drugs. I'm not sure but I think she may have asked a senior doctor there about the possible consequences.

41. Since telling my Partner I have told my children. I only told them after I had had the treatment and it seemed to be working. They were glad that I had a positive result in June, when the hospital said that as far as the treatment was concerned it had worked. I have not told my friends.

42. The infection has only impacted on my daily life because I've had a lot more appointments with hospitals and I probably will still have a lot of appointments, probably every quarter.

43. Having Hepatitis C has not impacted on my work but I have not told people at work about my infection. The only thing I've noticed at work is the headaches from the treatment. I have continuous update courses and technical training at work and sometimes it has been difficult to concentrate because of the headaches.

44. There have been no financial effects from me having Hepatitis C.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

45. I have not faced any difficulties obtaining treatment because of the Hepatitis C.

46. I have never been offered counselling or psychological treatment by anyone.

47. The Inquiry Team have made me aware of the support provided by the British Red Cross.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

48. I have never received any money in relation to my infection. I am not aware of any financial assistance available to me.

49. At the hep clinic the nurses mentioned a scheme of payments made mainly to haemophiliacs but they said they were asked to sign a letter

which was a vow of silence. Whether that's hearsay or paper talk I don't know but one of the nurses told me there was a scheme run by the NHS, I can't remember the name, which issued compensation to patients. The nurse believed it had stopped and that the money had now been diverted towards this Inquiry. I have no evidence of that whatsoever, that is what she believed.

50. So, I do know that money has been paid out to people or the families of people who had Hepatitis C or other infections as a consequence of receiving infected blood. I've googled lots of information and found newspaper articles and there is one in the Daily Mail about Peter Burney that stood out, because I thought crikey, that could have been me.

51. I don't have any observations on the financial assistance provided as I don't have any details about it.

Section 8. Other Issues

52. I don't have any other medical documents apart from the recent letters I've received. I have never requested a copy of my medical records. The Brook Hospital in Woolwich closed down, it's now a housing development with posh flats, I've seen it. I believe the NHS bought the QEH military hospital and sold off the land that was the Brook Hospital.

53. I think that this is probably one of the biggest cover ups by the NHS. The NHS is a massive company and it's the biggest bill the government's got. I can understand perhaps why they tried to reduce costs with regards to purchasing blood products but I think they made a massive mistake or I could say that it was mismanaged. As I understand it they bought blood products from various countries and no checks were made on the people that gave those products, about their backgrounds or lifestyle.

54. It has been a long time since I had my operation in 1988 and I can't prove or disprove things. Unless I had all the records in front of me from the Brook Hospital you can't rightly say the Hepatitis C was or wasn't from

infected blood. But it just seems too much of a coincidence, after having a normal life.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 11/10/2019

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FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KEITH BENNETT
SCHEDULE OF EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT NO.	DESCRIPTION	PAGES
WITN3559002	Letter dated 12 October 2018 from Dr Ali to Dr Hagan	2
WITN3559003	Information leaflet about Hepatitis C	6
WITN3559004	Letter dated 12 December 2018 from Dr GRO-D to Mr Bennett	1
WITN3559005	Letter dated 22 January 2019 from Dr Bird to Dr GRO-D	2
WITN3559006	Letter dated 21 February 2019 from Ms Clark to Dr Hagan	1
WITN3559007	Letter dated 21 February 2019 from Ms Clark to Dr Hagan	1
WITN3559008	Information leaflet about Liver Fibroscans	2 (4 A5 pages)
WITN3559009	Letter dated 26 March 2019 from Ms Avards to Dr Hagan	1