

Witness Name: Sandra Rowbotham

Statement No: WITN3654001

Exhibits: WITN3654002

Dated: September 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SANDRA ROWBOTHAM

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I, Sandra Rowbotham will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Sandra Rowbotham of GRO-C  
My date of birth is the GRO-C 1960. I am currently retired due to ill health. I have three children: my eldest is 40, my second eldest is 35 and my youngest is 30.
2. As a result of receiving contaminated blood products (blood transfusion) I was infected with Hepatitis C (Hep C).
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

#### Section 2. How Infected

4. On the GRO-C 1984, I received an emergency blood transfusion at St David's Hospital in Cardiff following severe blood loss, post-pregnancy of my second daughter. I was under the care of Mr Roberts, a Consultant at the hospital.

5. No information was provided to me or my husband beforehand about the risk of being exposed to infections through the blood transfusion.
6. As stated above, as a result of the blood transfusion that I received in 1984, I was infected with Hep C.
7. Approximately six to eight weeks later after I received the blood transfusion, I recall watching the news and I saw a feature on 'Contaminated Blood' and started worrying about myself. I expressed my concerns to Dr. GRO-D who was a doctor at the hospital and she brushed aside my concerns and accused me of having baby blues. She told me not to be silly. No further investigations were carried out.
8. In or about 2008, I started feeling poorly, which continued for about a year. I had pains in my stomach, rectal bleeding and I was always very tired. I complained about the above symptoms to my local GP, but no one ever actioned it. I was just advised to take paracetamol and rest and I was sent home. I took the GP's advice.
9. In or about 2009, the above symptoms had worsened. I therefore visited my local GP and I was seen by a locum doctor. I told her that I was in constant pain and was getting no answers from any of the medical professionals regarding the matter. I was told by the locum doctor that my symptoms could have been caused by a reaction to the liver medication that I was apparently taking. I told her that I only took paracetamol and didn't know anything about any liver medication. She seemed surprised and repeated what she said that I had reacted to the medication for the Primary Biliary Cirrhosis (PBC). I was confused and explained that I had heard nothing about PBC. Much to my surprise, the locum doctor informed me that I had been diagnosed with Hep C in 2004 which was the cause for PBC. This was the first time that I was told I had Hep C.
10. I asked the locum if Hep C would kill me and she answered that it would but it was likely that another condition would kill me first.

11. I asked the doctor how I had contracted it. She asked me if I drank alcohol, which I confirmed that I did. She also asked if I received a blood transfusion and at the time it didn't click to me that I had as it was a very long time ago. I then later told the same locum doctor that I had received a blood transfusion. She said that it was a possibility that I contracted Hep C through the blood transfusion.
12. In the five years between 2004 and 2009 and all the tests I had undergone, nobody had ever bothered to inform me that I had Hep C and it had been left untreated. I was later referred to Dr Vasani, a Hepatologist at Hartlepool Hospital (HH).
13. No information or advice was provided to me regarding Hep C. The only information I had ever received was from the research my daughter did herself online.
14. Nothing was ever discussed with me about the effects of Hep C would have on me. I do not believe that adequate information was given to help me understand and manage the infection. Whenever I posed questions to the doctors, I received no answers.
15. Considering that there was a five year period from the date I was diagnosed with Hep C to the date I was informed, I consider that information should have been provided to me when I was initially tested positive.
16. I am annoyed about how the infection was communicated to me. Even today, I feel I am getting no answers from the doctors.
17. When I was told I had Hep C, I was completely shocked. I had been diagnosed for a period of five years prior to being told and during that period I had seen numerous GPs, none of whom felt the need to disclose this life changing information to me.

18. In terms of the risk of transmission to others, GRO-C  
GRO-C  
GRO-C was told

that she had contracted Hep C in the early 1990s. She was told that she contracted Hep C as a result of food poisoning. I do not know if I believe this reasoning and unknowingly, I may have transmitted the infection to her.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

19. I feel that all of my current health conditions have been onset by the Hep C. I don't know if I can make a link between the symptoms that I am suffering and the Hep C, but this is how I feel. Since 2009, my health has entered a state of decline.

### **Section 4. Consent**

20. I cannot recall giving consent to the blood transfusion in 1984 as it was administered in a state of emergency. I do not believe that my then husband gave consent to it either.

21. I believe that I was treated and tested without being given adequate or full information.

22. I do not believe I was treated or tested for the purposes of research.

### **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

23. Prior to 2009, when I was unaware of the Hep C, it was extremely frustrating to go to the GP and complain about my symptoms only to come out empty handed and without answers. I had undergone numerous blood tests and I was always told that the blood tests results were fine. I had so many health complications such as pains in my stomach, rectal bleeding, tiredness and constantly feeling lethargic. Again, I was told that nothing was ever found.

24. From the year 2009, I have suffered from a series of different illness, coupled with the mental effects of having Hep C, it has not been pleasant to cope with. I have suffered from depression for years, but when I go to my GP about the matter, they prescribe me with anti-depressants. If anything these make me feel worse about myself. They have never offered me alternatives such as counselling or psychological support. My health plays on my mind a lot, but I

had to accept things as they were and get on with it. I feel the tiredness had also had a massive impact on me. When I was well, it would take me about an hour to clean my house, but nowadays it takes almost 3 to 4 days. Some days I do not have the energy to attend to my personal hygiene.

25. As stated above, I currently have PBC. I also suffer from, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a heart condition, difficulties breathing, irritable bowel syndrome, rectal bleeding, ulcerated colitis, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. I take various medications for the above. I exhibit a copy of the medication that I take at **'WITN3654002'**.

26. At one point the doctors discovered cysts on my voice box that needed to be removed surgically. Furthermore, my teeth began to rot and became very loose. I was told that I would have all the teeth removed at the same time as the cysts surgery. However, during the surgery they were only able to remove four of my teeth because I suffered a massive heart attack on the table and the doctor had to stop the surgery midway.

27. I was diagnosed with underactive thyroid prior to the blood transfusion. I believe that this condition has deteriorated since the transfusion. However, I cannot prove that this is a direct consequence of the infection.

28. For the PBC, I take one capsule of Ursodeoxycholic Acid four times a day. I also take painkillers and use inhalers. I have been going for regular blood tests, and I have been told that my results do not show anything adverse and they will keep me informed if there is anything to be concerned about.

29. I experience bad mood swings which believe were triggered by the Hep C. Katie still complains that one minute I am calm and level minded and the next I am aggressive and high tempered. I also get very depressed at times. This impacts my social life as I never want to go out anymore. This was not how I used to be. I was extremely outgoing and sociable. My friends and family described me as a party goer. I also acted as host frequently, but now I don't have the energy anymore. My family used to be together all the time, but I

could no longer physically cope with all these gathering. I struggle just to go shopping or into the town centre as I suffer from dizziness.

30. Had it not been for my grandchildren, I would have given up on myself. They keep me going and as a family, we are very close. Not knowing if I will be around to see them grow up is devastating. I do not want to entertain such thoughts, but the uncertainty of my future gives me very little choice.

31. My daughters were both upset and shocked to hear about the infection. I find it difficult to talk about the Hep C with the family as it sounds like a dirty disease and I feel that people relate the infection to 'AIDS'. For this reason the infection has been kept within the family unit.

32. I do recall post-pregnancy that I was admitted into a room on my own and noted that the mirror in front of me was covered with brown paper. It may have been a day or two after giving birth when I tried to get out of bed and collapsed. I was told by the doctor that I suffered a haemorrhage. Though I was not aware at the time, I had also gone extremely pale in the face. When my husband questioned the hospital on why the mirror had been covered, they answered that it would have frightened me to see my own reflection due to my complexion. I was kept in this room for hours and occasionally staff popped in and out to check on me. I now believe that the reason why they kept me isolated in a room is because I was given infected blood products and I was possibly infected.

33. I used to manage a chain of pubs. However, because of the infection, I had to retire early on medical grounds. Had I not been infected and been in good health, I would still be working in pubs today. In consequence of taking early retirement, I have struggled to cope with my finances. It is not easy to live solely on sickness benefits.

## **Section 6. Treatment/care/support**

34.No counselling or psychological support was made available to me in consequence of being infected. I believe it would have helped had it been offered to.

35.Katie researched Hep C years ago, and told me that it was really bad, but the doctors never felt the need to convey the seriousness of the infection to me.

36.In the last few weeks I have been falling over all the time. Social workers are due to install a chair in the shower. When I stand in the shower, if I tip back my head even slightly to wash my hair, I fall backwards.

37.My local GP, Dr Hodgeson, has organised rehabilitation for me to attend on 29 August 2019. I was informed to attend by telephone and my daughter wrote down a reminder for me. I do not know what it is for; or if it is relevant to the making of this statement.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

38.I have not received any financial assistance from any of the trust or funds that have been set up in consequence of being infected with Hep C.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

39.I would like answers for what happened back then and I would like to emphasise that I should have been told of the risks involved in getting a transfusion.

## **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

40.I do not want to apply for anonymity.

41.I do not want to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

**SANDRA ROWBOTHAM**

Dated

23/9/19.