Witness Name: Russell Gunning
Statement No.: WITN3818001
Exhibits: WITN3818002-003
Dated: 29\1\2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RUSSELL GUNNING

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 05 November 2019.

I, Russell Gunning, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Russell Gunning. My date of birth is GRO-C 1957 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am retired after a long career working for Gateshead Council and live in Gateshead with my wife. I have three children from my previous marriage and a stepson from my second marriage. I intend to speak about my experience of
2. Hepatitis C, which I contracted following a blood transfusion in 1990. In particular, I intend to speak about the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on myself and my family.

Section 2. How Infected

3. I separated from my first wife in January 1990 and in November of that year became very ill with stomach problems. I began passing blood and was admitted to hospital, where I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. Within the first few days of admission, I was given a blood transfusion, which I was told was necessary to treat the blood loss that I had suffered.

4. The first bag of blood that I was given caused an allergic reaction, I experienced an outbreak of hives and a high temperature. I understand that an allergic reaction can be quite common during blood transfusion. The nurse said I needed a closer blood match, and I was given a second bag.

5. I do not recall any warnings about risks associated with blood transfusion or being asked for my consent. Although I was very ill at the time, I do remember that I had to a sign a release to put a Central line into my heart, so it is likely I would have remembered another request for consent or any warnings that I was given. I believe I was only transfused a single bag of blood.

6. I was released from hospital around two weeks later. For the next year, I had to take an anti-inflammatory medication to treat Crohn's disease. I ceased taking the medication after a year and have not required any treatment since, so it may have been a misdiagnosis.

7. Prior to my admission to hospital, I had donated blood every 6 months. Afterwards, because of my diagnosis with Crohn's disease, I was no long permitted to donate blood.

8. By 1995 I had begun a relationship with my current wife. In July 1995, I received a letter from The National Blood Service advising me that the blood transfusion I received in 1990 may have been infected with

Hepatitis C and that I needed to undergo a blood test. (See Exhibit WITN3818002).

9. I did think it was strange to communicate with someone that they may have such a serious infection by letter. Receiving such news in this way could be detrimental.

10. Personally, I wasn't too worried. My first thought was the test would just be routine, as it had been 5 years since the blood transfusion and I hadn't been ill.

11. The transfusion in 1990 was the only blood transfusion I have ever received. I have no tattoos or piercings and do not have any history of intravenous drug use or sexual promiscuity.

12. I underwent a blood test at The Transfusion Centre in Newcastle and a few weeks later returned to the same hospital for a consultation with GRO-D. At the consultation she informed me that I had contracted Hepatitis C.

13. I was shocked. It was difficult to comprehend. I remember coming out of the hospital and sitting in the car, wondering how this could have happened.

14. I recall that GRO-D told me that it would be 30 years before the virus affected me, and said "who knows if any of us will be here by then". I'm not sure whether she was trying to soften the blow by saying this but it was a strange thing to say. She gave me some information about precautions to take to stop the spread of infection, I specifically remember being told to clean up any spilled blood with bleach. I don't recall any information about sexual contact nor was I provided with any details of what to expect going forward....other than wait 30 years to see!

15. Because I had been so unwell when I received the blood transfusion in 1990, I'm not sure if I experienced any symptoms of Hepatitis C during

the initial period of infection. It took me around 6 months to a year to recover after hospital admission and I would have attributed any illness during that time to Crohn's disease.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. I do not believe that I have received any infection other than Hepatitis C as a result of being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

17. At the time I was tested for Hepatitis C – to which I did consent, I do not recall any mention of testing for HIV or vCJD.

18. I'm not aware of being involved in any other testing without my knowledge or for the purpose of research. During treatment for Hepatitis C in 2000, I was asked to be part of a study and declined, as explained in Section 5 of this statement.

Section 5. Impact

19. When I was first diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I recall that GRO-D GRO-D said that the treatment was very expensive and that it would not necessarily be available straight away. This seemed unjust as it was the hospital that was the source of the infection. There didn't seem to be any medical reason just the financial aspect.

20. I don't recall receiving any treatment, including liver-related treatment or testing, at the time of my diagnosis. Over the next two years I had periodic blood tests at the Freeman Hospital but didn't experience any symptoms of Hepatitis C.

21. In 1997, I was offered and began my first round of treatment, which was Interferon only treatment. The treatment was supervised by Professor Bessendine at the Freeman Hospital and administered by

members of her team who I would see every month for a check-up and blood test. This arrangement was the same during my second and third rounds of treatment.

22. I had to inject myself with Interferon three times a week. Injecting yourself is horrifying, particularly when you've never had to do it before.

23. The first injection was the worst. I was warned it would be like having the flu, but that didn't really capture it. I was in agony, I had headaches, shivering, my body ached, my very bones ached. The second injection wasn't quite as bad, and then with each one after that it gradually eased, but the day after an injection I would still feel achy, as if I had flu.

24. As a result of the Interferon I began to experience 'brain fog'. I'd forget things; be miles away when someone was talking to me. At work I was suddenly confused by tasks which previously were routine for me to complete, which was embarrassing because I had worked there since 1981. I mentioned these problems at my monthly check up but was told they were standard symptoms of the treatment.

25. One month after starting Interferon, I was told that the virus was undetectable in my blood. I continued the treatment for a year. One month after stopping, it was detected in my blood again. It was devastating; I had made it through a year of injections and pain all for nothing and now I would have to do it all over again.

26. Over the next two years, I was monitored regularly and felt well. I carried on with life as normal. Despite the fact that the virus hadn't cleared, I felt much better than I had on the treatment. Of course, I felt better because I wasn't experiencing the side effects of Interferon. However, because the virus was still present I was conscious there was a risk I was sustaining liver damage. For this reason, I requested to undergo treatment again.

27. In 2000 I began treatment with combined Interferon and Ribavirin. As in 1997, I had to inject myself with Interferon three times a week, with the addition of Ribavirin tablets daily.

28. I only lasted three months. I felt physically destroyed, I was so weak with fatigue, my sleep was disrupted and I felt so down that I may even have started to slide into depression. I explained the difficulties I was having to my doctors and they asked me to continue, but I couldn't do it. It was what I wanted to do, because I needed to get rid of the virus, but I couldn't have the treatment and work and look after my children. It was too much to cope with.

29. A few weeks after stopping the treatment I felt fine again. The difference between being on the medication and off it was like night and day. Another two years of monitoring came and went during which again, I can't say that I noticed any particular side effects of the infection, before I began a third and final round of treatment. I can't remember if this was because I requested it or it was offered to me.

30. Before the first round of treatment, I was told I had a 25% chance of clearing the virus. Before the second round, it was 40%. Before the third round, it was 75%, and I thought, maybe this time it will work. The later treatments were worse in a way because I knew what was coming.

31. In 2002 I began treatment with pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. Since I had struggled so much in 2000 I decided with the support of my employer to take sick leave from work and I ended up being off for three months before I was fit to return. The council were a really good employer, and receiving sick pay meant that taking time off didn't cause financial problems.

32. It's an indicator of how bad the treatment was that I had to take the time off, because I would have preferred to be at work. I had continued working through both of my prior courses of treatment. The third round

was the worst for side effects: the fatigue, the flu-like symptoms, the brain fog, and two additional symptoms.

33. The first additional symptom I experienced was depression, which began after about a month of treatment. I had been warned that depression was a risk so I contacted my treating team and they sent me to speak to my GP. Trying to explain, it all got too much and I burst out crying whilst I was speaking to him. He prescribed anti-depressants, which I hadn't taken or had any need for during the previous two rounds of treatment.

34. The second additional symptom I experienced was boils, which appeared all over my body, including on my face. One would burst and drain, and then another would start somewhere else. They persisted for 6 months. My wife and I referred to it as the plague of boils. The doctor gave me an antibacterial wash but there was no real explanation for what was causing them. Although not overly painful, they were unsightly and made me feel miserable, I thought that my immune system must have been really low to get such an outbreak.

35. I returned to work after the three months' leave. I was still exhausted and physically drained. I would come home and fall asleep on the sofa. My home life was completely disrupted during this period. I could at times be irritable and moody. I was no use for anything it just takes so much out of you.

36. I completed the third round of treatment after a year. I finished two weeks earlier than planned however, as I got to a point that I just couldn't stick the needle in anymore!

37. I had a liver biopsy before beginning each round of treatment. The results said that my liver was inflamed and confirmed that I needed treatment. I can't remember if there was any mention of scarring. Although I don't recall being offered an alternative to a biopsy, before

or after the first biopsy, I also had a scan. Each time I would have to wait a few weeks for the results.

38. At the time of the third biopsy I remember that I was asked to be part of trial, which would have involved having another biopsy at the end of the treatment. I had to say no, because the biopsies were so painful and uncomfortable.

39. The first biopsy used a standard needle, the second and third used a needle gun. After the third biopsy, I had been left on a bed in a corridor to recover when I suddenly started having extreme pain and couldn't breathe. It passed after 10 minutes, but I was in extreme discomfort and it is hard to express the level of fear you feel when you can't get your breath. Suffice to say I never wanted to have another biopsy.

40. After I finished the third round of treatment in 2003, I was monitored over the next few years. In 2006, I finally received the all clear in a letter from The Freeman Hospital. (See Exhibit WITN3818003).

41. I've blocked out some of my memories of the years of treatment. I had put it to the back of my mind until watching the hearings brought it back and once I had committed to give this statement I had some sleepless nights.

42. The infection did not cause any major problems in my personal life. I was diagnosed shortly after my second marriage, so it did cause concern to my wife. It was an unknown quantity and the treatment as I've mentioned was difficult. She supported me through thick and thin, despite the fact she must have worried for my health and for our future, especially after the failure of the earlier rounds of treatment although we both felt like we didn't have any option but to get on with it.

43. The treatment did cause me to be irritable at times and my kids probably bore the brunt of that. I remember on one occasion, during the first round of treatment, I was driving my son to a football game. I

couldn't find the field they were meant to be playing at, I was exhausted and completely on edge, and I had a bit of a meltdown in the car. My poor son was only young, it was not fair on him having to see his father go through that.

44. My wife was tested for Hepatitis C and was negative. I had separated from my former wife prior to the transfusion. GRO-C

GRO-C

45. I was able to be open with my managers at work about my illness so there were never any issues beyond my health during the treatments. In those periods, I couldn't work at my optimum level because I was so drained. As I was employed in the sports and leisure department, I had the option to do additional work at events after-hours, but I couldn't cope with these extra duties, both during treatment and for some time afterward because it was too tiring.

46. The treatment itself didn't have a major financial impact as I received sick pay. I was always given time off work to attend hospital appointments, although I did make that time up many times over the following years.

47. Where I did experience a financial impact was in acquiring life insurance. My wife and I bought our house in 2000, and had to get life insurance for the mortgage. My wife's insurance was quoted at £6 per month and mine at £25 per month. We arranged the policies and were trying to finalise them and the company kept delaying, I think because of my Hepatitis C status. It was very stressful and we nearly lost the house. A soon as the policy came through, I changed to another provider. The cost was still high but it was approved straight away.

48. I didn't go abroad during the period I was the having treatments so I didn't have to go through a similar process to acquire travel insurance.

49. I did experience an incidence of stigma that I believe was related to my Hepatitis C diagnosis, which occurred when I was having my first liver biopsy. I was waiting for the biopsy in a hospital room and there was a man in the next bed, with a sheet separating us. He seemed very unstable and may have been a drug addict. The nurse tended first to him and then to me, and she seemed very cold. When I'd previously been to hospital the staff had been like angels, so I wondered if she was classing me the same as him, because of the association of Hepatitis C with drug use.

50. When the doctor came into the room to administer the man's biopsy he was screaming, and the doctor had to repeat it. I was waiting my turn and listening to him scream, which was a horrible feeling. When he came over to me, the doctor introduced himself by saying "I'm Dr X, I've come to drill a hole in your liver". I wasn't sure what he meant. Again, was he was trying to make light of the situation? I don't know for sure. I was able to shrug it off but if I'd been a different type of person I could have been devasted by a comment like that. A biopsy is not something to be taken lightly.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

51. Despite the fact that I hadn't been able to complete the second round of treatment, I wasn't offered any psychological support before beginning the third round. That may have helped me face it and get through it with less apprehension. In fact, I haven't been offered any psychological support at all, from diagnosis until my all clear Even with the depression, it was pills only.

52. I have had no issues in accessing other medical treatment when I had Hepatitis C. My dentist was aware and had no problems. I don't believe that there was any other treatment available that I was denied access to.

53. I did a lot of my own research when I was diagnosed. I bought a book called 'Living with Hepatitis C' and undertook internet research which was all a great help. Did I have to do this? I felt I had to as I didn't feel I had enough in-depth information provided by the hospital.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

54. In around 2004 I received a £20,000 extra gratia payment from the Skipton Fund. It was the only payment I received from the fund at that time, I didn't receive annual payments.

55. I can't recall how I first came to find out about the fund. I might have heard Lord Morris of Manchester mention on it on the news, or it might have been on an internet forum. I found out about the forums from the book 'Living with Hepatitis C' that I bought after I was diagnosed.

56. I applied to the fund and my application was supported by Professor Bassendine at the Freeman Hospital. I was amazed when I received the payment but I had to sign a release stating that I would not pursue any further claims.

57. In 2001, I enquired with a solicitor about the possibility of seeking compensation. This was after I ended my second treatment and I think I was pretty angry at the time. This didn't go anywhere for a few reasons: I was out of time to submit a claim for personal injury; I was out of time to submit a claim under consumer law; and it would have been very expensive to apply to the European Court of Justice for an extension of time, as part of a group claim.

58. In 2016, I was notified that I would begin to receive annual payments from the Skipton Fund and then subsequently from the English Infected Blood Support Scheme. I was gobsmacked, wondering why something was happening after all that time. I thought it wouldn't apply to me because I was cured, I couldn't believe that I would get it.

Section 8. Other Issues

59. I don't have any particular animosity about what happened. It hasn't altered my opinion of health professionals adversely. At the time of the transfusion in 1990 I really did need the blood. With that said, I'm concerned about the possibility of a cover up. I feel very lucky that I was cured, and I find it concerning that it's taken 30 years to get to an inquiry when there are people still suffering and dying.

60. I didn't think that my story was exceptional in any way and as mentioned, I had put it to the back of my mind. It's not something I want to think about. Seeing the footage of the hearings and hearing other people's stories changed my mind and I thought I should speak out. Hopefully my account adds some weight to that of the others and helps the Inquiry to reach the right conclusion.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 29/4/20