

Witness Name: C A Planter

Statement No: WITN3892001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: December 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CLAIRE ANNE PLANTER

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I, Claire Anne Planter will say as follows:-

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is Claire Anne Planter and I was born on GRO-C 1977. I live at GRO-C Bristol, GRO-C. My mother, Michelle Suzanne Kusnierek, and my brother, Simon Andrew Kusnierek, have also provided witness statements to the Inquiry.
2. I make this statement as an affected daughter of my late father, Alan Edmund Kusnierek, who was born on GRO-C 1953 and passed away, aged only 51, on 23 April 2005 as a result of contracting Hepatitis C from contaminated blood transfusions.
3. **This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late father's medical records.**

## **Section 2. How Affected**

4. My late father had ongoing complications with Medullary Sponge Kidney (MSK). This is a congenital disorder of the kidneys characterised by cystic dilation of the collecting tubules in one or both kidneys. He had numerous episodes of kidney stones and experienced excruciating pain. My late father was therefore frequently in and out of hospital. He received a number of blood transfusions, during surgical procedures at Southmead Hospital in Bristol during the 1980s.
5. As far as I am aware my late father was not given any information or advice regarding the risks of infection from blood transfusions.
6. My late father did not find out about his Hepatitis C infection until July 2004, which was only about 9 months before he passed away.
7. He had been seeing numerous kidney specialists and further investigations and referrals were taking place in relation to why his blood was not clotting. I recall that a new doctor took one look at my late father's hands and asked whether he had been tested for Hepatitis C. In my view, my late father had been completely overlooked by the hospital in terms of not only his Hepatitis C but also in relation to the way in which his kidney condition was managed and dealt with.
8. It was not until he started to vomit blood that an endoscopy was carried out which then through further tests the diagnosis came back that my late father had Hepatitis C. I am unsure as to exactly how he was told or what was said to him but I recall that he was put onto the liver transplant list and was told that the wait for the new liver would be about 6 months.
9. It sounds strange but we actually thought that my late father getting a new liver could actually signal a fresh start for him; away from all of the pain and multiple health problems that had plagued him throughout his life.

10. Unbeknown to any of us, including my late father, he had been battling Hepatitis C for many years and finding out about this diagnosis actually meant that we had some sort of explanation for the numerous health problems and constant pain which my late father had so quietly and bravely endured.

11. My late father underwent the liver transplant in March 2005 at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. Unfortunately, he was given a poor-quality liver which meant that his body rejected it almost immediately, despite the fact that he was on a high dose of immunosuppressive drugs. During his time in intensive care at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital he contracted a type of MRSA, C. difficile, and sepsis and ultimately died from complete organ failure.

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

12. As far as I am aware my late father was not exposed to, or infected with, any other infections.

### **Section 4. Consent**

13. It is possible that my late father was tested and treated without his knowledge and therefore without his consent. The medical consultants were trying out new treatments on my late father and they would frequently talk about such treatments and trials. However, although my late father was aware of some of these trials, he was the type of person who did not want to find out too much anyway as he had so much faith (misplaced in my view) in the medical consultants and what they were doing. My late father used to get frustrated with my mother because she would question everything that the medical consultants were doing. My late father used to say, "*I only need to know the basics of what they are doing*". However, towards the latter stages of his life he became quite confused and disorientated so I don't think that he could have validly consented to anything.

### **Section 5. Impact**

14. My mother told me that my late father was in and out of hospital in the year I was born and was bleeding a lot the following year which was the year my brother was born. Subsequently, during the 1980s he was in and out of hospital as a result of his MSK which necessitated many procedures and operations. He then underwent numerous operations on his kidneys during the 1990s due to his MSK but there were always complications due to his constant bleeding and requirement for platelets.
15. Throughout this time, he was on a lot of pethidine as his pain levels were unbearable. He was accused of being a pethidine addict by the medical consultants (in particular his GP) because their view was that, following the removal of a large portion of his kidney, he should no longer be in any pain. They ignored him and did not investigate as to whether anything else could be causing this pain.
16. He had managed to hold down different types of jobs including working as a security guard and a baker. I think that the pain as a result of the MSK was tolerable and what my late father could not tolerate was the pain caused by the Hepatitis C as it slowly eroded his liver and body; causing irreversible damage. However, at the time no one knew that my late father had Hepatitis C and I can see that he presented with higher pain levels and symptomatology than could have been expected or anticipated from MSK.
17. When I was aged about 10, I remember that my late father's health really deteriorated. He was extremely lethargic, sweated profusely and was constantly out of breath. He would bruise easily and had very thin skin. I recall a caravan holiday with my family where my late father had to be taken back to the caravan by my mother after lunch so that he could sit on the chair all afternoon as he was unable to manage a full day of excursions. He was unable to go out and about like "*normal*" people. MSK has its own symptoms but the Hepatitis C diagnosis brought a type of clarity in terms of finally making sense of the symptomatic pattern presented by my late father.

18. When I was aged about 12 my late father had to give up work completely because the pain became unbearable. This was a difficult time for him and also for the rest of the family.
19. I recall one particular incident following an operation which my late father underwent. He was left with a tube sticking out of his back and was bleeding from this tube. I had to help mop up the blood and my mother and I had to call the GP out to the house as he was bleeding so badly. There was a high risk of infection but by the grace of God I was not infected. When we found out that my late father had Hepatitis C I had to get tested to see whether I had become infected but thankfully I had not been.
20. I got married in 2001 and although my late father managed to attend the church service we had to do the photographs with him in very quickly as he could not stay on beyond the service as he was just too poorly. My late father looked like an old man in his 60s or 70s. My brother had to do the speeches in his place.
21. If my mother needed to go away for the weekend or to do things, I was the one who would step up and help look after my late father. I was always very calm in a crisis and used to support my mother as well as she often became quite stressed about matters. I always helped my mother with looking after my late father and the house.
22. I used to go the hospital to support both my late father and my mother and I also cared for my late father at home including cooking him meals and managing his medication. I definitely took on a greater role than my siblings. In some ways I was more suited to this role than them given that I was very familiar with hospitals having been in and out of them as a child for my club foot. I was born with this condition and had to have a number of operations during my early years. Unfortunately, these operations went wrong and I am currently undergoing further surgery. However, by the age of about 10 I was out of my special boot and performing gymnastics. I managed to defy the odds and a lot of this was down to my resilience and strength of character.

23. However, it is fair to say that during my younger and teenage years I was effectively somewhat deprived of a normal upbringing. When I went to University my mother would still call me and say, "*can you help out this weekend please*". I would go straight to the hospital or my parent's house and sit with my late father and keep a calm head in order to diffuse my mother's anxious states. I remember sitting with my late father in hospital prior to one of his operations and having to get bowls for him to vomit blood into. This was very difficult to witness; it felt more like torture and I nearly fainted.
24. My late father had to spend his last Christmas without any teeth because they had all been removed as over the years they had deteriorated very badly. He could not go ahead with the liver transplant with his teeth still in as they were too much of an infection risk. His dentist was extremely supportive and did lots of work on my father's teeth but obviously his whole body had been affected by the virus.
25. When my late father was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham for his transplant it was me who collected the family and drove them to the hospital. I also acted as my mother's second pair of ears at the hospital. When my late father passed away, I organised the funeral with my husband and my brother.
26. My late father and I had similar personalities and outlooks on life; we were both strong characters. My late father was very upbeat and stoic like me. He would not dwell on matters or moan and would just get on with things. This was probably why he was ignored for so long; he did not like to complain.
27. When I think about it now, I am a little aggrieved with my mother that she got to go out and do things and left me in charge of things when perhaps she should have been there for me. However, now that I am a mother myself, I appreciate that life gets hard and that you do need to do things for yourself in order to be a good mother.

28. My daughter was born one year after my late father's passing. He missed out on being a grandfather and the entire experience. He had saved all of his toys out of the cornflake boxes for any possible grandchildren. He never got the opportunity to give the toys himself.

29. Following my late father's passing, I am effectively responsible for my mother. My mother had a breakdown following his death due to the injustice of it all and the fact that both her and my late father had been called liars for all of those years when she had asked whether it could be Hepatitis C and was told no. My mother had researched the symptoms and thought that it could well have been Hepatitis C.

30. I then had to help my mother through her breakdown and I took her to the GP and to Southmead Hospital in this regard. My brother also helped out by carrying out DIY at her house and helping her back into employment. My mother's breakdown had a negative effect on my eldest daughter who had to witness her grandmother having a breakdown, having to stay with us and sacrificing things so that we could give my mother the support she has since needed.

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

31. My late father was not provided with any counselling or psychological support and I have never been offered the same.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

32. Neither my late father nor any member of my family received any support from the Skipton Fund or the EIBSS.

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

33. I want this Inquiry to ensure that those who are responsible for this tragedy are held accountable. My poor late father was failed by the system. When it

was finally acknowledged that he had been infected with Hepatitis C through no fault of his own, it was too late for him and his life because the damage had already been done. His whole life was one of misery and struggle, caused by those who needlessly infected him. His pain was totally avoidable as was this scandal. They not only ruined my late father's life but everyone else's lives in our family.

**Anonymity**

34. I do not want to apply for anonymity and I do not wish 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

Dated..

13 January 2020