

Witness Name: George Wieland Schneider

Statement No: WITN2802001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: June 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GEORGE WIELAND SCHNEIDER

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I, George Wieland Schneider, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is George Wieland Schneider of GRO-C Kent, GRO-C I was born GRO-C 1935. I am a retired Costs Lawyer and the husband of Margaret Patricia Schneider of the same address, who became infected with Hepatitis C after receiving a blood transfusion.
2. I am making this statement in support of my wife, Margaret Patricia Schneider, as she now has Vascular Dementia and her condition is gradually deteriorating, meaning she would be unable to give evidence herself.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my wife's full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited information the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

## **Section 2. How Affected**

4. My wife and I were married on 31 March 1981. My wife subsequently became pregnant and, following her numerous complaints of severe and consistent pain and discomfort, her GP referred her, in late 1981, to Hastings General Hospital (then called 'The Buchanan') where the pregnancy was diagnosed as ectopic, which had become seriously infected after the death of the foetus. Her condition was considered to be life threatening, she was immediately admitted and underwent an operation to remove the foetus during which she was given several pints of blood. Following this procedure, the surgeon informed my wife as to the operation which had been carried out, the blood transfusions which had been required, that she should have no further problems and would be able to return home in a few days time.
5. After her return home she attended the hospital for a post operation check and was subsequently released with the check pronounced to be satisfactory. After returning home, in the winter of 1981-1982, she had developed persistent symptoms akin to influenza accompanied by pain and discomfort in the area of her liver. She was referred back to hospital by her GP for checks, when the presence of Hepatitis C, then known as Non A Non B Hepatitis, was diagnosed. Her liver was swollen and remained so for years afterwards.
6. Margaret was diagnosed at the Buchanan Hospital in Hastings, later called Conquest Hospital. We were told absolutely nothing about the nature infection, the prognosis or potential routes of transmission.
7. Wondering how she could have become infected, it dawned on us that the termination of the ectopic pregnancy was to blame until it became more obvious that it was the blood transfusions that must have caused the infection to be transmitted to her.

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

8. I am not aware of any other infections that Margaret may have been exposed to.

### **Section 4. Consent**

9. I do not recall when Margaret consented to being tested for Hepatitis C.

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

10. At the time that Margaret was infected I was working as a law costs draftsman in my own practice and Margaret was acting as my practice manager bookkeeper, involving inter alia; collecting and returning case papers to my clients, disclosing papers to court when necessary etc.
11. The diagnosis of Hepatitis C was traumatic for my wife, especially following on from the recent loss of our baby. It also had a huge impact on us. Of particular concern was Sarah, her daughter from her previous marriage who was living with us. The diagnosis seemed to blight our future.
12. We had heard about Hepatitis being a nasty condition and potentially fatal, so it was very worrying for us both. We were also worried about the risk of infection to both me and my step-daughter.
13. We kept the news of the infection to ourselves as we didn't want the news to spread and cause alarm to the rest of her family; 3 sons, now independent. We were concerned for Sarah and the impact it could have on her, so we never told her about the infection. In any event, she was very young still.
14. Margaret continued to have intermittent liver pains, and medication provided by her doctor did nothing to help this. Some years later we went to see a

homeopath which gave Margaret some relief, but unfortunately this treatment stopped when the homeopath moved to Ireland.

15. Over the next 30 years she had periodic appointments with doctors to monitor her health. Also, more specifically, the Hepatitis C infection was monitored.

16. Margaret went to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Margate, around 6 years ago, complaining of a swollen liver and to ask if she still had the virus. They said to her 'we cannot tell you for sure that you still have Hepatitis – the only way is to have an invasive operation to be sure'. We were told at the same time that it might be dangerous. We did not ask for this operation in those circumstances.

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

17. Neither I nor Margaret were offered counselling at any stage.

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

18. In or about 2000 I heard by chance that the Skipton Fund in London was dealing with Hepatitis C claims. My wife asked me to put in a claim. I made every effort to locate Margaret's medical history and any supporting evidence from 1981 onwards. It became apparent that most of the records had ceased to exist whilst those still available had been sent to our local general medical practice.

19. I ascertained that the remit of the Skipton Fund was limited and I found its conduct was amateurish. It seemed to me it's was to receive and then reject claims. Its subsequent adjudication on Margaret's claim amounted to her never having been infected with or been subject to any Hepatitis C virus infection.

20. I considered this decision to be unjust, even with the limited weight of evidence in her favour given that most of the important and earlier documents

had either disappeared or were no longer available. I considered their decision perverse. My requests for reasons and further information and for preservation of any of our documents held by the fund fell on deaf ears. They did not even acknowledge my requests.

21. Such few papers as I once held were destroyed by me because, at the time of their destruction, it seemed that I was metaphorically 'banging my head against a brick wall', especially after the Skipton Fund's involvement.

22. I believe the Skipton Fund was appointed by Government to fend off the huge number of potential claims. It seems to me that it was and probably still exists as a nepotistic organisation which is not concerned about helping the majority of claimants who were infected. I came to dislike the organisation in the way that they acted. They didn't answer questions and were dismissive of claimants concerns. That was my experience of them and I still hold these views.

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

23. It all seems to me that most of my wife's evidence disappeared without any explanation. I have encountered unhelpful organisations, particularly the Skipton Fund. I still wonder exactly what was going on until this Inquiry was announced. Frankly, I had given up hope of any chance of a full investigation after the problem's magnitude had reached the public domain, that is, until the Prime Minister mentioned this Inquiry.

24. I want the Inquiry to look into why some of the medical records were kept and some were not. Why I had hit a brick wall whilst trying to obtain them and had been told that most of the relevant earlier ones were destroyed years ago. Also, whether victims are entitled to be compensated and what is proposed for families of those whom the infection cause death or contributed to their earlier death.

**Anonymity**

25. I do not wish to remain anonymous.

26. I would consider giving oral evidence to the Inquiry if it is believed to be helpful. Please, bear in mind that I am over 84 years old.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed..

GRO-C

Dated

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