

Witness Name: Joseph Downing

Statement No: WITN3963001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: February 2021

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOSEPH DOWNING

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I, Joseph Downing, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Joseph Downing. I was born on [GRO-C] 1997 and I live at [GRO-C]  
[GRO-C] Lanarkshire [GRO-C] Scotland.
2. My grandfather, Joseph Higgins (born [GRO-C] 1947), was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) through a contaminated blood transfusion. He died as a result of liver cancer on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2014, aged 67.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my grandfather's medical records.

## **Section 2. How Affected**

4. My grandfather ('Grandy' as I always called him) was given a blood transfusion during emergency surgery for a burst ulcer at the Monklands Hospital, Airdrie in or around 1976.
5. Grandy did not know that he had been infected with HCV. He was not told of the diagnosis for 23 years. The first Grandy knew of it was towards the end of 1997 when Dr Fox, Consultant Cardiologist at the Gartnavel General Hospital in Glasgow, nonchalantly asked him 'Did you know that you have Hepatitis C?' Before that, he had not even heard of the virus. Dr Fox went on to tell Grandy that he was infectious and would not be able to kiss his grandchildren.

## **Section 3. Other Infections**

6. I do not believe my grandfather to have been exposed to any other infection than HCV.

## **Section 4. Consent.**

7. My grandfather did not know that he had been tested for HCV. Dr Fox knew that Grandy had HCV without running any tests of his own. The information was on his medical records. Grandy did not consent to tests and was shocked to be told of the HCV diagnosis and he felt cheated by his doctors.

## **Section 5. Impact**

8. I was a young boy and, as such, Grandy did not open up to me about being infected with HCV but he opened up to my mother and it became apparent to me as I grew up just how much he was affected by it. He felt embarrassed. He

didn't want to be seen. He wouldn't go out without us. My mother (Mum) effectively became Grandy's carer. My schooling and my friendships were consequently affected. We would go to Grandy's house straight from school every night to cook his dinner and have our dinner with him. I was really close to Grandy. I was the closest to him out of all his grandchildren. I often stayed with him over night on a Saturday or a Sunday. He didn't like to be on his own and my mother worried about him being left alone for any significant period of time.

9. Three of Grandy's six children had Friedreich's Ataxia (an extremely rare muscle wasting disease that ultimately targets the heart) and subsequently died from it. My only remaining aunt was killed in GRO-C. The HCV infection was a huge psychological burden for Grandy to carry in addition to losing his wife and four of his six children. Because of the stigma and the worry of infecting other people, he felt dirty. I didn't see much of GRO-C growing up because GRO-C did not want her children to come into contact with Grandy. That was distressing for Grandy and also affected our relationship with GRO-C It caused a bit of a rift in the family.

10. Being infected with HCV left Grandy's liver in a terrible state. He had a few attempts at clearing the virus but they weren't successful. We spent a lot of time with Grandy at his hospital appointments, at least every week, at Monklands Hospital for blood tests and medication. After Grandy was diagnosed with liver cancer we went with him to his cancer and chemotherapy appointments in Glasgow.

11. I was 15 years old when Grandy was diagnosed with liver cancer. I remember Mum coming into my room to tell me. She didn't cope well with the news. She

GRO-C

GRO-CI spent a lot of my teenage years dealing with my GrandyGRO-C

GRO-C

GRO-C

None of us coped well. I lost a part of my childhood. I would have done better at school and I didn't stay on/return to school after Grandy died.

12. Grandy moved in and lived with us before he died. We went through a lot of trauma at that time and it was years before we could start to rebuild our lives. Mum GRO-C She now lives on her own, runs her own shop GRO-C I have a good job as a car mechanic, and I am married with a young son. Grandy I know would been so proud of me and the life I have made for myself. He would have loved my little boy. I wish he could have seen him because they would have got along together just great. We were all cheated.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

13. None of us were offered counselling or support.

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

14. I am unable to comment on the issue of financial assistance for Grandy from any Trust or Fund. I am aware that GRO-C  
GRO-C

#### **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

15. I am not seeking anonymity and understand that this Statement will be published by the Inquiry.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed.....

GRO-C

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Dated.....31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.....