Witness Name: Elizabeth Mary Vose
Statement No: WITN4894001
Exhibits: WITN48940002-005
Dated: 7 · 4 · 21

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH MARY VOSE

I, provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 30 November 2019.

I, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Elizabeth Mary Vose and my date of birth is GRO-C 1958. I reside in GRO-C with my husband, Graham and daughter, Rebecca, and my full address is known to the Inquiry.

2. I've been married to Graham since 1983 and we have one daughter. My husband works as a mechanical engineer and I started my nursing career in 1977, and qualified in 1981, where I began to work on a medical ward at Queens Park Hospital Blackburn. I am still registered as a nurse and work occasionally as an NHS bank nurse.

3. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C (HCV), which I contracted from a needle-stick accident between 1983-1987, whilst working at Queens Park Hospital. In particular, the nature of these illnesses, how they have

affected me, the treatment received, and the impact this had on me and my family.

4. I can confirm I am not legally represented and I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement.

5. My statement was written in the presence of my husband, Graham, and it was decided during my interview that he will provide his own statement **(WITN5582001)** relating to how my treatment affected me and our family.

Section 2. How Infected

6. Once I qualified as a nurse, I worked on a medical ward at Queens Park Hospital Blackburn. Between 1983 and 1987, I remember treating a gentleman on E2 ward: within the general medicine department. I was administering him with intramuscular antibiotics, when I accidentally pricked myself with a needle.

7. I immediately informed the Sister on the ward and she referred me to the special clinic, because this patient was positive for syphilis. At the time, I was not aware that this patient was also likely HCV positive. Tests for hepatitis c virus have only been available since 1989, so he could not have been tested for it. As syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease and hepatitis C can be transmitted sexually it seems obvious to me that this was the case, however I cannot know for certain.

8. The Doctor who attended to me said, '*it was a silly idea for you to be sent to the special clinic, as there is no way you could have contracted syphilis*'. I am not aware if this incident was reported to occupational health, but I made note of it in the accident book. At the time, auditing was not as rigorous as it is now, so I haven't been able to trace the accident book. I didn't think much more about this incident until 1991.

9. My husband has always donated blood and in 1991 I decided I would also become a blood donor. Following my first donation, I received a letter from Lancaster Transfusion Centre stating, "your donation reveals the presence of certain abnormal properties. I would like to assure you that the test for HIV was negative" (**WITN4894002**). They requested a second blood sample and contacted me saying "your second blood sample is also positive for hepatitis C antibody", and "I should contact my general practitioner" (**WITN4894003**).

Section 3. Other Infection

10. To my knowledge, I was never infected with any other viruses or diseases, as a result of the needle-stick accident between 1983-1987.

11. As a registered nurse I had vaccinations for hepatitis B, but I was never told anything about the risk of transmission of hepatitis C through a needle-stick injury.

Section 4. Consent

12. I believe I always gave consent to tests and treatment, and I have no concern that my blood was used for purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

13. After my needle-stick injury, I was concerned that I could transmit a disease to my husband, so we refrained from having sex until I received my test results for syphilis. This was a very difficult time for us, as we were also trying for a baby.

14. I stopped drinking once I found out I was infected with hepatitis C, because I was extremely worried about making my liver worse. This wasn't particularly difficult, because I never drank heavily and lived a healthy lifestyle. I also remember feeling tired the whole time, but I cannot say I experienced any other physical side effects.

15. My work was flexible and night shifts were always optional. Despite this, I would avoid volunteering for night shifts, as I felt extremely fatigued and needed more rest. I would also say my appetite changed, in fact, food didn't appeal to me much at all.

16. Following my first diagnosis with HCV in 1991, I continued to live a relatively normal life, despite the tiredness and lack of appetite. The Doctor ordered blood tests, advised very generally about HCV, and did very little at that time. As mentioned later in my statement, I received no treatment at this stage, nor any psychological or counselling support.

17. I left the NHS and worked in nursing homes until 2002. I then returned to work at Queens Park Hospital which required a medical. The occupational health doctor questioned me about my hepatitis C and what care I was receiving for it. He told me that HCV could lead to serious health problems. This came as quite a shock, as in 1991 I was not advised to take any action to treat my HCV. He advised me not to work in theatre or do invasive procedures.

18. I had to wait until 2006 to start treatment. I was informed that my liver function blood tests showed no significant damage to my liver, nor did an ultrasound liver scan show any notable damage, and that treatment was available to me on the condition that I would need to have a liver biopsy. As I explain at paragraph 33, I feared undergoing a liver biopsy, but I wanted to start treatment and clear the virus.

19. As such, in 2006 I agreed to the biopsy and started treatment for my HCV. This is where things started to go downhill. As a registered nurse, I was able to administer my own peg-interferon injections. I found this incredibly challenging because the treatment caused horrific side effects, but I knew it was the only way to clear hepatitis C.

20. The treatment for hepatitis C got progressively worse; after three weeks of treatment I was in such a bad place, that I had to completely stop working. Eventually the Doctor decided to lower my dose, as I became very ill. I was

then off work for another 11 months whilst I completed the treatment. My neutrophils were very low and my health was deteriorating quickly, so I was advised to stay away from people and not to go on holiday.

21. I soon developed other side effects: skin rashes, hair loss, mood swings, weight loss, constant nausea and low mood. It got to the point where I spent most days in bed and I couldn't get up, nor do any normal daily activities. I could do the bare minimum, for example, wash and feed myself. My husband looked after me and ensured I was comfortable, but this took a toll on him, as he had to look after our young daughter and work full time. It was a very difficult time for our family and especially for my husband. I did have to get up to attend the hospital in Manchester regularly for blood tests and to receive my medication.

22. I was stressed throughout the course of my treatment and constantly felt guilty for burdening Graham and Rebecca with my illness. My daughter and husband missed out on holidays and I constantly worried that I could infect them. It was difficult to escape these thoughts.

23. The treatment pushed me into a dark place and had I not been married, or had a child to consider, I would have quit. It affected every aspect of my life, but I persevered and lived by the motto, '*what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*'.

24. Over the course of my treatment the financial burden grew heavy on our family. I only had full pay for six months, then half pay for three months. I went to occupational health and the job centre, where I was assessed, but I scored zero so they were unable to assist. I also sought help from our local Citizens Advice Bureau, where I similarly hit a dead end. I did appeal and received incapacity benefit near the end of my treatment. Although I did not feel well, I returned to work soon after I completed my treatment due to financial problems and was afraid of losing my job.

25. We continued to send our daughter to private school and also had a big mortgage on our house. Graham works as a mechanical engineer and at the

time, acted as a manager for a large factory. He couldn't do his job remotely, but since I was sick, he also needed to be at home to care for me and take responsibility for all parental duties. I should say that the financial difficulties we experienced throughout 2007 have left us struggling to this day.

26. During this time, I stuck with the treatment and didn't ask for any extra help. I found it difficult to discuss my infection with others, as there was a lot of stigma associated with HCV. I only told close family and friends, because I didn't feel comfortable broadcasting such personal information.

27. Once I got back to work, hepatitis C did not prevent me from progressing in my career. I could continue my nursing work and enjoy it thoroughly. Although, the attitude of some members of staff angered me, because If a patient was admitted with HCV, staff would suggest that the patient should be placed in a side ward.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

28. In 1991 when I received the letter from Lancaster Transfusion Centre, a three-page leaflet on hepatitis C was provided, which I remember clearly as it read, *'a lot of people have hepatitis C, it isn't dangerous…avoid sharing towels or razors, etc'* (**WITN4894004**). It was a very basic leaflet and at the time, I didn't know much else about it, but I made an appointment with a Doctor at Blackburn Royal Infirmary. My bloods were taken and I was seen by a liver specialist, but no further action was taken.

29. I also spoke to Doctor Shwe at Lancaster hospital a haematologist, who advised that my husband should wear condoms when we have sex and I was welcome to speak with his team.

30. During the late 80's and early 90's, my husband and I were trying to conceive, and we eventually sought IVF treatment at the Regional I.V.F Unit St. Mary's hospital, Whitworth Park Manchester. As I received no follow-up after my first diagnosis with hepatitis C, I put it to the back of my mind. I had various blood tests and fertility treatments, none of which were successful.

31. I did inform the IVF unit that I was Hep C positive. I noticed some nurses took more precautions in my appointments, which brought to my attention that they were aware of something, that both my husband and I were not. Fortunately, in 1997 my husband and I were able to conceive naturally, although I was always worried about passing on the virus to my daughter, Rebecca. This was a very emotional time for my husband and I.

32. GRO-C

GRO-C I did consult a Doctor about the risk of transmitting hepatitis C through breastfeeding and I was told there is a risk it can be transmitted, but it is a choice for myself and my husband. This was particularly worrying and is constantly in the back of your mind, niggling away. Even now, I worry when my daughter is tired or even the slightest bit under the weather.

33. I did see a Doctor Mahoney in January 1992 and had a liver function blood test but I cannot remember any further follow up after the initial tests taken in 1991. It was not until 2002, after I had continued working in both the private sector and for the health authorities, that I went to see the occupational health Doctor who informed me I still had hepatitis C. He asked if I had been treated in the past for hepatitis C and I explained that I had only been given the diagnosis in 1991, however I hadn't received treatment.

34. Following this appointment, I was referred to Dr Banait at the Blackburn Royal Infirmary. He saw me every 6 months and monitored my liver function blood tests; I would say he was thorough, and a lovely Doctor. It was also discussed that I should undergo a liver biopsy, but I was hesitant to have one at that stage, as my father-in-law died after a biopsy.

35. In 2006, I eventually agreed to a liver biopsy, which took place in Blackburn. Following this I was referred to Manchester where I was advised to start a 48-week treatment of peg interferon, and ribavirin administered with weekly injections and tablets twice a day. I was also prescribed Granocyte, because my white blood cell count was dangerously low.

36. At the beginning of the treatment, a doctor in Manchester considered taking me off the treatment because I was so unwell, stating, *'you're middle aged, 47 years old, you have lots of time'*. This made me very angry and I begged to stay on the treatment, as I knew I had to clear this virus, get my health back on track, and be around for my family. Despite the horrific side effects, the hepatitis C treatment worked well. The doctors at Manchester Royal Infirmary kept a close eye on me, and fortunately, I cleared the virus later that year.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

37. I became aware of the Skipton fund whilst having my treatment, but my husband took the reins on this. He did a lot of research and eventually downloaded the forms. We applied in October 2007, with the support of a clinician at Manchester University hospital.

38. A month later I received a letter stating the Skipton Fund could no longer progress my application, as they had no documentary evidence that I was PCR positive, or that I had received a blood transfusion between 1980 and 1990 (**WITN4894005**). I found this frustrating as I couldn't find a written record of my needle-stick accident between 1983 and 1987, and I didn't think to obtain further medical evidence. I felt I had hit a dead end.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. When I was 20, I had my appendix out, but I never received NHS blood products or blood products through a blood transfusion. I also have no tattoos and have not taken drugs. My ears were pierced when I was about 12 or 13 years old, which took place in a reputable establishment.

40. I should also mention that I am very grateful to have received treatment, as it saved my life.

41. Since speaking to the Investigator and the Paralegal who assisted me in writing this statement, I feel better that someone has listened to my story. I certainly have some closure and I hope others find this too.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 9.4.21