Witness Name: Jaime Florez-Mesa
Statement No: WITN4908001
Exhibits: WITN4908002-006
Dated: 25/02/2021

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JAIME FLOREZ-MESA

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 20 November 2020.

I, Jaime Florez-Mesa, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Jaime Florez-Mesa. My date of birth is GRO-C 1949. I live with my wife in GRO-C, Surrey and my full address is known to the Inquiry.

2. I am originally from Columbia and I emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1972. I met my wife, who is British, in the United Kingdom in 1974, and we married on 2 April 1976. My wife and I have been married for 44 years.

3. We have one adult daughter who lives in Florida, in the United States. My wife didn't want any more children, so we didn't try for a second child.

4. My wife, daughter and I lived in the United States for a period of time. While I was living in the United States I brought some of my family over from Columbia to live with us, so some of my extended family still live in the United States.

5. I am currently retired but I have worked as a production operative in factories over the years.

6. I was forced to retire from my job in June 2014 because of an injury to my back. My supervisor noticed that I was dragging my left leg when I walked and he sent me home that day as per company policy. He said that I would need to find out what was wrong with my leg before I could come back to work. I took sick leave while I was off work.

7. I went to the doctor and was diagnosed with multiple spinal degeneration disorder. They had to replace 3 discs in my back below my lumbar areas. When my boss saw the industrial doctor's report he said that given the company policy, I could not continue to work, and I was laid off 5 months before my 60th birthday.

8. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

9. I can confirm that I have not been involved in any other Inquiries and I have chosen not to have legal representation and am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement.

10. I wish to acknowledge that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me, and I have chosen not to seek anonymity.

Section 2. How Infected

11. In 1975 I fractured my jaw after an accident. I had surgery after the accident and received blood transfusions at the Queen Mary Hospital in East Grinstead, Surrey. I believe that I developed Hepatitis C as a result of these transfusions.

12. In 1975 I was working at the Wayside Manor Hotel in Reigate, Surrey (now known as the Reigate Manor Hotel). In the winter of 1975, there was an incident where I injured myself at the Hotel. I remember that it was winter as it was very cold.

13. To enter the Hotel, we were required to use the outside emergency exit stairs, which were very narrow. On this particular day, the steps were very slippery from the snow that had frozen over. I slipped on the steps and fell, hitting my face very hard on the ground.

14. I remember that my jaw was cracked so badly that the bone went upward and pierced my skin. I also cracked some bottom teeth.

15. I remember that I was in a lot of pain, I was in agony. At the time, I thought that it was my cracked tooth which was causing the pain. I was in so much pain that I wanted to pull the tooth out myself. My face was swollen like a balloon.

16. I went home and my wife, who was my girlfriend at the time, saw my injuries. She called an ambulance and I was taken to Redhill General Hospital, which is no longer in existence. We were told that the procedure that I needed could not be performed there. I was kept at Redhill overnight and then transported to the Queen Mary Hospital in East Grinstead, Sussex.

17. At Queen Mary they gave me an injection of morphine for the pain and a team of surgeons performed an operation on my fractured jaw. They needed to put my jaw back together. I received blood transfusions during the operation and I stayed in hospital for 5 days.

18. When I awoke from the operation, I remember that I had tubes coming out of my arms. One of the tubes in my arm was connected to a small bag of blood and one was connected to a bag of what I assume was a saline solution. My wife told me that I had lost a lot of blood and that the towel she used on me was soaked with blood.

19. I was not advised about the risks associated with receiving blood transfusions as I was unconscious during the operation. As I mentioned above, when I woke up in the recovery room, there were tubes going inside of my body, which were connected to 2 bags, which were saline and blood. My wife told me that she had called an ambulance to bring me to hospital and that I had lost a lot of blood. She said that when she called the ambulance my face was so swollen that you couldn't see my eyes.

20. After the operation, my jaw had to be wired up for 2 months. A wisdom tooth and another tooth were removed as I needed to have all food liquidized to drink through a straw.

21. I eventually forgot about the incident and the operation. I left the hotel and went to work in a factory.

22. While I was working in the factory, some representatives from another company, who were completing a merger with the company I worked for, attended the workplace. They liked the way I worked and offered me a job at their factory in the United States.

23. My wife was a bit hesitant to move to the United States at first because she is an only child and she was concerned about who would look after

her mother and father. We went to the United States for 2 weeks to see what it was like and we decided to make the move.

24. I gave my notice and emigrated to the United States in July 1980. The company I worked for was located in New York, so we settled in New York. The company I worked for helped me to find a home. We lived in America for 15 years and my daughter was born there. We bought a house there as well.

25. During our time in America my father in law passed away. Eventually we moved states to live in Florida as I got a job there.

26. We returned to England in 2004. I got a job in East Grinstead at a factory. I worked 12 hour days, 6-7 days a week. One time I worked 24 hours without a break. I used to work 16-18 hour days. I even had my own towels and slippers at work as sometimes I would work so late that I would take a shower at work to wake myself up.

27. In around 2007/2008, I started to feel a pain in the right side of my ribs, behind my rib cage. It felt like a knife was stabbing me. It was a persistent pain and it felt like it was in the liver area. I thought that I had stones.

28. I went to see my GP at the time, Doctor Adams. He sent me for a full blood test and liver scan right away. The results came back normal.

29. After a few months, I went back to the doctor. I saw a doctor at East Surrey Hospital as I was still experiencing the pain on the side of my ribs. He sent me for a full blood test again and I went to Gatton Park Private Hospital for a scan. I was told again that the results were normal.

30. It continued on like this for 2 years. I would go to the doctor at my GP surgery, and they would tell me that nothing was wrong with me.

31. We then moved house to GRO-C. As we changed areas we had to change GP surgeries. We registered with the Holmhurst Surgery in Redhill and I went to see another GP there, Dr Kerr and he told me there was nothing wrong with me.

32. I told the doctor about the pain in my side and he said that there was nothing wrong with me. He accused me of lying to him. I went downstairs to the reception area and told the receptionist that the doctor was very rude to me, and I wanted to see the doctor in charge.

33. The doctor in charge was Doctor Marilyn Hieatt. The receptionist told me to wait for ten minutes as Doctor Hieatt was still with a patient. I was then sent in to see Doctor Hieatt.

34. I told her about the pain that I was experiencing. She made me lie down and told me to take a big breath in and hold it. She examined me and said that my liver was as big as a melon. She said to me words to the effect of, "And they said there is nothing wrong with your liver?"

35. She phoned the pathologist at the East Surrey Hospital and said to them, 'how can you say that there is nothing wrong with this patient after all of these blood tests, his liver is the size of a melon'.

36. She sent me to East Surrey again for a blood test and sent a letter to the Manager of the pathology centre. I went in right away and had the blood test. I remember that I was working the day that Doctor Hieatt called at the factory and asked me if there was any way that I could come into her surgery as she needed to see me. She told me that I could enter through the back door as the surgery was closed on the weekend.

37. When I arrived, she told me to take a seat and she said, 'listen, you have Hepatitis C'. I asked her where it had come from. She said that it had likely come from bad blood and asked if I had ever received any blood

transfusions. I told her yes, a long time ago when I had the operation at the Queen Victoria after fracturing my jaw.

38. I couldn't believe that East Surrey had not picked up this problem for the past 4-5 years, when I kept going to them with pain and kept having blood tests. If it was not for Doctor Hieatt I probably would not be here today.

39. She said that she would send me to Epsom Hospital as it was the best hospital for liver problems. She had already booked me an appointment with Doctor Lim, a Gastroenterologist at Epsom Hospital. This was in around 2010.

40. I attended Epsom Hospital and Doctor Lim told me that it would be a long process with my Hepatitis C. He said that they would need to do a liver biopsy to take a sample of my liver to test it. They did this by inserting a long needle into the liver to take the sample. It was very painful. I was diagnosed with genotype 2B Hepatitis C. I was also found to have mild fibrosis of the liver.

41. To my knowledge, I was not tested for HIV.

42. I attended Epsom Hospital and saw Doctor Lim again. I also saw another of his colleagues, a female doctor, who was very sweet. They asked me questions about my lifestyle such as whether or not I drink. I told them that I only drank socially as I worked long hours and didn't have time to go to the pub.

43. I believe that I was given adequate information about the virus and the risk of infecting my family members. I was told not to share my toothbrush and to keep my things separate from my family members. I was advised to have my family tested. GRO-C GRO-C

44. I told the Doctor that I drank cider and would have around 2-3 pints a week. The Doctor said that this was ok, as long as I stayed away from heavy alcohol such as whiskey and tequila. They said that it would be ok for me to drink a couple of ciders a week.

45. They did a scan to measure if the virus had caused any damage to my liver, as they call the virus 'the silent death'- it can lay dormant in your body for 15-20 years and then it starts causing damage to the liver.

46. After the scan they showed me that there was a portion of my liver which was black. They said that this was the area of my liver which was permanently damaged and that it would never go back to normal.

47. In 2010, the doctors at Epsom Hospital offered to enrol me in a drug trial for a new drug to treat Hepatitis C. The treatment was a combination of Pegylated Interferon (known as 'Pegasus') and Ribavirin tablets. There were 10 people on the trial and they informed me that it had already been run in America.

48. I took part in the trial. It involved self-injecting with the Interferon at home once a week and taking Ribavirin tablets daily. I was shown how to inject myself at the Hospital.

49. I was required to have a blood test every week after starting the treatment to monitor any damage that may have been caused to my liver, or other organs such as the kidneys.

50. Although I was mainly under the care of Doctor Lim and Doctor Moodie at Epsom Hospital, I would only see them once in a while and most of the time when I attended the hospital I was seen by Gastroenterology Clinical Nurse Specialist, Sister Ting Tan.

51. The treatment was meant to be for 1 year, but it was stopped after 3 months because I did not achieve the early viral response that is

necessary. I didn't achieve an adequate drop in my viral load. It was determined that I would not have responded had they kept going for a year of treatment. A letter confirming this is labelled **Exhibit WITN4908002.**

52. In around 2014, Sister Ting told me that a new drug had come out that was going really well in America. She said that she would put me on the list to be part of a trial. The drug was a combination treatment of Ribavirin and Sofosbuvir. I had to take 1 tablet of Sofosbuvir a day and 6 tablets of Ribavirin a day. The Sofosbuvir had been trialled in America but was made by a Swiss company. A list of the medications I have taken during my illness is labelled Exhibit **WITN4908003.**

53. I took this treatment for 3 months. It was meant to last for 6 months but it was so effective that they decided to end the trial after 3 months. The treatment ended in 2015.

54. One day I attended the hospital to see Sister Ting and she said that she had good news. I'd had a fibroscan which showed that there was spotting to my liver, but that the virus was no longer detectable. Sister Ting told me that the bad blood would stay in my system forever, and that the virus was still there, but it was lying dormant and the levels were so low that it was not detectable. I had effectively cleared the virus.

55. However, fibroscans have shown that I have cirrhosis of the liver.

56. I still attend Epsom Hospital for regular check-ups every 3 months. I have a blood test whenever I attend. I usually see Sister Ting. My last appointment was in October 2020. In September 2020 I had an ultrasound scan which showed a 'moderately echogenic liver with diffuse fatty change'. There were also 'moderate diffuse cirrhotic changes'. A letter confirming this is labelled **Exhibit WITN4908004.**

57. My next routine appointment at Epsom Hospital was postponed due to COVID-19, and I am due to attend again in January 2021. The appointment on the 21 January is for my fatty liver disease, which the doctors are worried about, as it causes fibrosis.

58. I have told the doctors at Epsom Hospital that I don't want to be sent to East Surrey Hospital again, and Epsom have told me that they won't send me there as they don't trust them because of their failure to diagnose my Hepatitis C. They told me that Epsom is a better Hospital for liver patients.

59. I have never used intravenous drugs and the tattoos and piercings that I have were professionally done. The operation I underwent at Queen Mary in 1975 was also the only time I have been given a blood transfusion in my life.

60. I have suffered from other medical conditions as well as Hepatitis C. I have a condition related to my prostate called neurogenic bladder disorder. I developed this around 2 years ago when I had an enlarged prostate, and it will stay with me for life.

61. It means that my nerves are not sending the signal to the brain which allows you to go to the toilet, which causes me to have fluid retention. I remember that when I went to the Hospital they gave me so much water and I still could not go to the toilet. Basically, my bladder is not functioning anymore.

62. As I mentioned previously, I also have a problem with my back, which is called multiple spinal degeneration disorder. The only way for my back to get better is to replace the disks, but the operation is too risky at my age. I think that I will end up in a wheelchair eventually. My sciatic nerve is also pressing down which is why I have a limp. I believe that my limp is also related to my treatment, as it had started around the same time that I had the treatment for Hepatitis C.

63. A while ago around 2015 I went for a simple operation at East Surrey Hospital and ended up with a 6 inch plate with screws in my left hand. As a result of the operation I lost all feeling in my hand and I currently wear a cast on it.

64. I went to my current GP, Doctor Lovis, at the Wall House Surgery, who I had transferred to after Doctor Hieatt retired. Doctor Lovis is a good Doctor, I think that she is the best Doctor I have ever had.

65. Doctor Lovis sent me to East Grinstead Hospital and they did an MRI. They said that my hand was very damaged as the screws had pierced through and damaged my ligaments. I have now had 4 operations on my hand and it is still not better.

66. The first operation was 4 years ago, after I retired. I had a big lump in my arm and I went to see a Doctor about it. He said that I would need a fifteen minute operation. He did the operation and put a pin in. Two weeks later the pin came out by itself. I then lost all feeling in my arm and hand. My hand has been permanently damaged and I can't use it for anything. It then felt numb and I had to have an operation on my elbow.

67. I also had a right knee partial medial meniscectomy in January 2020 for a degenerative tear to my knee.

68. I've been to hell and back. I may look ok on the outside but I have been through a lot. GRO-C
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Section 3. Other Infections

69. As far as I am aware, I did not receive any other infection besides Hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

70. I do not believe I was ever tested without my consent, without being given adequate or full information, or for the purposes of research.

71. I couldn't consent to the blood transfusions as I was unconscious at the time that they were given.

72. I consented to receiving the treatment for Hepatitis C as part of the drug trials that I took part in as I wanted to get better.

Section 5. Impact

Physical and mental impact of Hepatitis C and the treatment

73. As I mentioned previously, before I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I was experiencing a very sharp pain under my rib cage. The only way I can describe the pain was that it felt like a knife stabbing into my side.

74. I started experiencing multiple cognitive problems after commencing the Pegylated Interferon (Pegasus) and Ribavirin treatment. I started to experience memory lapses, crying, body shaking, hallucinations and mood swings.

75. One minute I would be fine, the next I was crying. I would break out crying when watching a movie, which was unusual for me. Sister Ting told me that the memory loss was a very common side-effect of the Pegasus medication.

76. I started to experience a loss of my vocabulary. I could not recall things that people were saying, I kept forgetting what I was saying mid-sentence and I had to stop and think of how to put a sentence together. I also started to forget how to speak English.

77. My hair started to fall out, I experienced blurred vision, I lost weight, wasn't eating or sleeping and experienced depression and anger. I also experienced flu-like symptoms and started to lose my hearing.

78. With the mood swings, I would feel the urge to crash my car into someone and kill them. I am a good person, I come from a good family and a good background and I have never been that type of person or had these kinds of thoughts before. I wasn't myself, it was as though there was someone else inside of me.

79. It was like I was possessed by the devil. I'm a good natured person, I've never done anything wrong. My wife used to cry when I had my mood swings and my daughter was afraid that she was going to lose me.

80. One time during the treatment I started screaming at her. She was upset and said, 'Daddy, you've never screamed at me before'. I started crying and apologised to her. I knew that my mood was because of the medication as I had never been like this before. She forgave me and I told her that it was because of the medication.

81. One day in 2010 I was on my way to work and I forgot where I was going and I started crying. I was lost. I called the factory and told them that I couldn't make it in as I was lost. They were very good about this and told me to take the day off and not worry about it.

82. I went to Doctor Hieatt and explained my symptoms. I had never experienced these kinds of symptoms in my life. The doctor gave me a month off work but told me to continue on with the treatment. I continued

the treatment and my wife continued to take me to Epsom Hospital every week for blood tests.

83. I then started doing some research on the symptoms associated with the treatment and discovered that some people experience hallucinations, go crazy and commit suicide. I know that Pegasus was discontinued in America as some people committed suicide on it.

84. The Pegasus treatment was meant to be for 6 months, however, as mentioned previously, it was stopped at 3 months. This was partly because I didn't achieve the early viral response that is necessary, but I remember that it was also because of the severity of the side-effects I was experiencing.

85. In the meantime, I told the company I worked for, Ibstock Brick Limited, that I was fine to go back to work, but they wanted me to be examined by a company doctor to determine whether I was fit for work. The medical report regarding my fitness for work is labelled **Exhibit WITN4908005.**

86. I was examined by Doctor Byrne. After I was examined I was deemed as fit to return to work. By this point I was no longer taking the medication, but I was still experiencing the side-effects such as memory loss.

87. In 2018 he went to see a doctor about the cognitive side-effects as I was still experiencing them. The doctor was Doctor L Atiku, a Consultant Psychiatrist. He diagnosed me with a mild cognitive disorder. The letter confirming my diagnosis is labelled **Exhibit WITN4908006.**

88. The cognitive side-effects that I experienced as a result of the treatment have been long-term and I still suffer with them today. I still experience hallucinations, depression and memory loss. I will forget what I am doing mid-task or where things are. For example, I will get into a lift and I can't remember which button to press. I do puzzles and sudoku when I am

feeling depressed. My doctor advised me to do this whenever I feel depressed.

89. I still have problems with my vocabulary. I still struggle to put sentences together and forget how to say things. I was even scared to meet with the Investigator to make this statement as my language has deteriorated so much that I was worried about talking. My daughter told me not to worry and that I was going to be ok and that I should just be myself.

90. Things will never go back to normal for my brain. The treatment has done permanent cognitive damage. Before I commenced treatment for my Hepatitis C, I had never experienced any kind of cognitive problems.

Financial Impact

91. There have been a couple of occasions where my daughter and I have been planning to travel to Spain and as soon as I have declared that I have Hepatitis C my insurance would be astronomical, it would be £800 or £900.

92. My wife went to America for Christmas in December 2020 to see our daughter. I couldn't travel with her as I need to go to the hospital to have my catheter changed every 8 weeks. It would have been very costly for me to get insurance for the trip with all of the medical problems that I have.

93. My daughter wants me to go on a trip to Tokyo with her this year. I got a quote for insurance and it is £800, which costs more than the flights. I can't afford this.

Stigma

94. I only told a couple of people close to me about my diagnosis with Hepatitis C. I was very careful with who I told as I knew there was a stigma associated with Hepatitis, and that people would push me away.

95. I am very reclusive because of my diagnosis, as I don't want people to know that I have Hepatitis C, because I know they would reject me. If the people in the place I live knew that I had Hepatitis that would be it, they would not want to know me.

Impact on family members

96. I was very close with my mother in law, who died of cervical cancer. She was in her 70's when she died and she had chemotherapy that almost cured her before she died. She was like a mother to me. She saw the way that I was deteriorating with my illness and she cried at the time.

97. GRO-C so it has not been easy for us. We have been to hell and back.

98. As I mentioned previously, I have suffered long-term cognitive side-effects from the Interferon and Ribavirin treatment. When I was suffering from these symptoms my daughter felt sorry for me and she was afraid that she was going to lose me. She said 'Daddy, it would kill me to lose you'. My daughter and I, have a strong bond. She loves her mother, but we spent more time together when she was growing up, doing activities such as going to the movies etc.

99. The treatment I was given for Hepatitis C has changed me and my family has suffered because of this.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

100. I was never refused any treatment because of my Hepatitis C infection, and don't feel that I was discriminated against in terms of being denied treatment. I had to tell my dentist about the infection, but was never refused treatment by them.

101. At Epsom Hospital, they offered me therapy through the Hepatitis C trust. It was therapy with a group that met once a week. I declined this as I am quite reserved and I was happy to fight it myself.

102. My GP, Doctor Lovis, would take the time to talk to me and support me. She would sit and talk to me for half an hour when the appointment was only meant to be 10 minutes. When I was on the second drug trial and I was experiencing side-effects, I was able to talk to her about them. I really bonded with Doctor Lovis, we even spoke about GRO-A GRO-A

103. My former GP, Doctor Marilyn Hieatt, is a very sweet lady. When she told me that she was retiring, I felt like I was losing someone who did so much for me. I used to go into her surgery on Saturdays to talk and she would give me therapy. I used to talk with her and would sometimes cry because of the frustration I was feeling about all the things I was going through.

104. I was also able to talk to Sister Ting. She would sit and talk to me for an hour when I needed to. She has been an angel.

105. I feel as though I am currently getting adequate support for my medical conditions. I have nurses and carers who visit my home and provide me with support.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

106. When I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C my GP at the time, Doctor Hieatt, referred me to Epsom and St Helier University Hospital, where I was

introduced to the Skipton Fund. It was Sister Ting at Epsom who told me that I should apply to the Skipton Fund.

107. I made an application to the Skipton Fund in 2010. It was refused on the basis that I could not provide my medical records from the Queen Mary Hospital proving that I had transfusions there in 1975. This was because the Queen Mary Hospital had destroyed the records of my surgery. It was their policy to routinely destroy records 8 years following the most recent discharge date.

108. Because I could not provide my medical records, the Skipton Fund requested a picture of my jaw to ascertain whether there was any scarring from a possible operation. I provided this to them.

109. I appealed the initial decision and the appeal was refused on the basis that the Skipton Fund said that it was the view of their expert members, supported by the clinical records that I was able to provide, that it was very unlikely that the injury I sustained (broken jaw) would require a blood transfusion.

110. I don't really care about this as the focus for me has always been on getting better. I'm not looking for money. The most important thing for me was to cure this virus that was killing me.

Section 8. Other Issues

111. I feel grateful that my GP at the time, Doctor Marilyn Hieatt, discovered the Hepatitis. If it wasn't for her, I would not be here today, as the first Doctor I saw did not take me seriously when I complained about the pain in my side.

112. I love England because it is my home and it saved my life. If I was still living in America and I was diagnosed with Hepatitis, I would have lost

everything, I would be dead. I am really proud to be British and I wouldn't in a million years have what I have here if I still lived in America.

113. It would be nice to let other people know what people like myself and thousands of others went through, as I have said before, this virus was killing me silently, eating my liver, because if you don't stop the virus, that is what it does, you eventually get cancer in the liver. This is why they call it the 'silent death'.

114. People need to realise what we went through and are still going through. It will never go away, it will always be there for us.

115. When they told me that I had cleared the virus, I felt like I had conquered evil, the virus was eating me alive. Even though I experienced side-effects from the treatment, it is nothing compared to dying or to getting cancer.

116. I have had adequate support throughout the coronavirus pandemic. I received a letter informing me that I am a vulnerable person and that I should shield. I am classed as a vulnerable person because of my medical conditions. I have received adequate care and food deliveries during the pandemic. I also have asthma, which I only developed recently. I believe that I developed it through my Hepatitis treatment.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 25-02-2021

Exhibit Number	**Date**	**Description**
WITN4908002	01/02/2011	Letter from Dr Simon Moodie to Dr Hieatt regarding treatment with Interferon & Ribavirin and decision to stop treatment after 3 months.
WITN4908003	Undated	List of medications
WITN4908004	23/10/2020	Letter from Ting Tan to Dr Lovis regarding appointment at clinic
WITN4908005	18/10/2010	Medical report by Dr N Bryne sent to Mr Greg Crownshaw of Ibstock Brick Limited.
WITN4908006	19/03/2018	Letter from Dr L Atiku to Dr Lovis regarding mild cognitive disorder.