

Witness Name: Gareth Robin

Duncan Rice

Statement No.: WITN4916001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 29/2/2022

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GARETH ROBIN DUNCAN RICE**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 15 October 2021

I, Gareth Robin Duncan Rice, will say as follows: -

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

1. My name is Gareth Rice. My date of birth is GRO-C 1953 and I reside in East Sussex.
2. I am a self-employed commercial fisherman and live at home with my partner of 20 years. I have three grown up children between the ages of 23 and 30 years old and three grandchildren.
3. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C ("HCV"), which I believe I contracted via a blood transfusion following a road traffic accident in 1983. In particular, I will speak about the nature of my

illness, how the illness affects me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my life and my family.

4. I confirm that I have chosen not to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. I do not wish to be anonymous as I wish my story to be known in full.
5. I'd like to acknowledge that naturally as time passes, memories can fade and I make this statement without the benefit of my medical records. I have been able to provide approximate timeframes for matters based on life events. However, these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

6. The road traffic accident, referred to above, occurred in 1983. I was driving in thick fog during the early hours of the morning and missed a turning. The car hit a brick wall and was cut in half. I recall it being the day that the seatbelt law came into force. Despite this, both the passenger and I were not wearing a seat belt and we were thrown out of the vehicle. I was informed by the police that if I had been wearing a seat belt, I would have died.

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7. I sustained a number of injuries from the accident including; broken ribs, a punctured lung, a fractured pelvis, cuts to the head and knuckles and a badly broken ankle. I was taken to the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton and kept in for 3 weeks. I had two operations on my ankle, during which a pin was inserted to secure the broken bone back together.

8. I was initially unconscious for half the day of my hospital admission, but I was visited early on by my brother who is 7 years older than I. He told me that I had received a blood transfusion. I did not recall this being administered, but he assured me that it was. There are no medical

records to confirm that I received a blood transfusion and I do not recall whose care I was under whilst in hospital.

9. When I was discharged from hospital my leg was in plaster for 3 months and due to muscle atrophy, it took between 9-12 months to fully recover. At the time I was working as a stevedore at the Newhaven Docks – this was a very physical job but I was very fit and healthy prior to the accident.

10. I was not happy that the police took a blood sample at the scene of the accident, when I needed the blood. I was informed that I had provided verbal consent for this, but I do not believe this to be the case. GRO-C

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11. A few years after the accident I started to experience tiredness and pain in my liver, about which I consulted my GP. I am not sure when the pain started to develop – it would come and go but I would feel the pain most nights.

12. I saw an advertisement in the newspaper offering a discount for a full body check-up at a private hospital. I decided to go ahead with this considering the liver pain I had been experiencing. This would have been approximately 4-5 years after the accident.

13. Following the tests at the private hospital, I was instructed to book an appointment with my GP as it was noticed there was a problem with my liver. During this, further blood test were taken. I would say in the years following the road traffic accident and up until my HCV diagnosis, approximately 25 liver function tests were conducted, but I was consistently told that my liver function was 100%. No other symptoms of the HCV were detectable at this stage, although looking back I was very fatigued whilst working at the docks.

14. I later started to experience pain in my chest and further tests were conducted. I was notified that there was a problem with my liver but the doctors did not elaborate and I was asked for further blood samples. I was consequently diagnosed with HCV by the doctor, but I do not recall when exactly.

15. I was not informed of how I contracted HCV, but I recall saying to the doctor that it was from the blood transfusion – there was no other route and I was aware at the time that it was only transmissible by blood. As far as I was concerned, there was no other way I could have contracted the virus, I have never taken drugs intravenously and do not have any tattoos or piercings, nor have I undergone any medical treatment abroad. The doctor commented there was a possibility that the transfusion was the cause of infection, but they could not find any evidence to confirm that I received a blood transfusion during my hospitalisation following the road traffic accident.

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

16. I do not believe I was infected with any other infections other than HCV as a result of receiving a blood transfusion.

### **Section 4. Consent**

17. I was unconscious when I was first admitted to hospital so would not have consented to the blood and I was never told at any stage of the potential risks of receiving blood.

### **Section 5. Impact**

18. I started a 12-month course of Interferon and Ribavirin under the care of the Royal Sussex County Hospital in 2012/13 but I am unsure of the exact date. Whilst the hospital wanted me to start straightaway, I had to

wait for the next block before I could commence the treatment. It was emphasised that the treatment was a costly exercise (in the region of £60,000) and I was told there was no guarantee that it would clear the infection and if need be, I would have to take the treatment again.

19. I was instructed on how to inject the Interferon once a week into my stomach and took a number of tablets daily.
20. The Interferon made me feel sick a lot of the time and I was very tired and fatigued. I would spend 4/5 days of the week in bed. Eating stopped me feeling nauseous, so I overate. I cannot remember much at all from the year of treatment other than it being horrific. It has since become something of a blur. I developed a grey complexion and I recall my brother saying how all of the colour had completely drained from my face.
21. I was warned that hair loss was a possible side effect of the treatment and indeed my hair started thinning and falling out.
22. The medication completely changed my character – I became pretty bad tempered and it was horrible to be around me. I did experience a bit of depression, but it was nothing I could not handle.
23. GRO-C We have been together for 20 years but the treatment certainly had a negative impact on our relationship.
24. My children were fairly young during the year of my treatment and I could not do anything with them.
25. I was unable to work during the course of treatment because of the debilitating side effects. Had it not been for the fact that my partner had a well-paid job and I had income from a number of rental properties, we would have been in serious financial difficulties.

26. I tried to claim for disability benefits during this time, but my application was processed 10 months after completing the course of treatment. I had to attend an appointment in Eastbourne, but at this stage I had regained some of my physical ability and the support was refused.
27. I became aware that a few of the people who started the treatment alongside me dropped out because they could not cope with the horrific side effects. When I spoke with the nurse about this, she mentioned that 25% of patients do not complete the course of treatment because the medication is so heavy. I am a very strong-willed person, so there was no way that I was going to drop out despite it being the worst year of my life.
28. Blood samples were taken every month at the Royal Sussex County Hospital and at each appointment I was informed that my viral count was decreasing.
29. Once I finished the course of treatment, it was declared to be a success, yet I have had no contact or follow up with the hospital since. There is no programme in place to monitor the condition of my liver. I thought I would have been tested to confirm that the virus has not returned – this is still a worry of mine despite the fact that I have been told it is very unlikely.
30. I lost a year of my life due to the treatment I underwent and was unable to do anything. I did not drink alcohol for a year and could not socialise.
31. I have never undergone a liver biopsy, so am unaware of the extent to which my liver has been damaged by the HCV infection. The elasticity of my liver has been checked and it has been confirmed that I have lost some of the elasticity in my liver and it is not as good as it should be.
32. I still suffer with pain in my liver, but I gather that is to do with the damage caused by the HCV rather than the infection returning. I can confirm that the pain I experience is not to the same extent as before

the treatment. I have also been unable to lose the weight that I put on during the course of treatment. Before starting the Interferon and Ribavirin combination therapy, I was a 32-inch waist and fit as a fiddle, but I am now a 36-inch waist.

33. I do have health issues aside from the liver pain, but I would not say that they are attributable to the HCV infection. I have been experiencing chest pains since 2012 and my GP has recently referred me to the hospital for a CT scan. I also had a few biopsies on my prostate, but they came back clear.

34. When I contracted COVID recently I experienced headaches similar to those when I was on the Interferon treatment.

35. I wish I never had this particular treatment because it ruined my physicality and I have never been able to regain that. My health and fitness have always been very important to me.

36. I was always honest and open about my HCV infection – it was not something I felt ashamed about because I contracted it through no fault of my own. To confirm, I never suffered any stigma as a result.

37. I do not believe there was any difference in the medical or dental treatment I received as a result of my HCV infection, but I do remember the dentist being fully gowned up.

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

38. I believe I was offered counselling as a result of my hepatitis C infection, although I did not feel this was necessary once I had finished the treatment and cleared the infection.

39. I cannot recall the name of my specialist HCV nurse, but I found the medical professionals at the Royal Sussex County Hospital very

helpful. They were available to call anytime if I had any problems during the treatment.

40. What really angered me is that I heard there was a 3-month course of treatment available in America, which had no side effects. I brought this up in conversation at the hospital, but I was assured the NHS treatments were up to date. I later found out this was not the case. Had I of known this at the time, I would have gone to America and funded the treatment independently – whatever the cost.

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

41. I first became aware of the Skipton Fund during my 12-month course of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment and I applied in 2012 (approximately 3 months into the treatment).

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43. I was aware that I could appeal the initial decision, but I was still on the treatment at the time and was in no fit state to pursue it. I would like to add that I was never made aware of what grounds I could appeal the decision on.

44. If I had not been for my partner's financial support during the year of treatment, I would have pursued an appeal.

45. I have no access to my medical records, but I have been told verbally by my own doctor that there is no indication that I had a blood transfusion following the accident.



**Section 8. Other Issues**

46. I will be very upset and angry if the Inquiry discover that the government of the time knew that the blood was infected, yet still authorised its use.

47. I find it disgusting that the blood was never screened in the first place considering it was being sourced from prisons in America.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

9/02/2022

