Witness Name: Melanie Ravenshear
Statement No.: WITN3278001
Dated: 10 June 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MELANIE RAVENSHEAR

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 31 May 2019.

I, MELANIE RAVENSHEAR, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Melanie Ravenshear. My date of birth GRO-C 1965 and address are known to the Inquiry. I am a mother to one child, I am not currently working and really enjoy being around my animals in particular riding my horse. I intend to speak about my Hepatitis C (HCV) diagnosis and how it affected me and my family.

2. I am not legally represented. The investigator from the Inquiry has explained the anonymity process and I have chosen to proceed with my identity being made public. I would like my story to be heard as I have been battling this for a long time. I know that I was infected with Hepatitis C from a blood transfusion, I have nothing to be ashamed of.

3. The Investigator has also explained what the "Right to reply" process is, should I make any such criticisms I am aware that there is an existing agreed procedure that will be followed.

4. As these events have occurred almost 30 years ago and during a period of my life where I was seriously ill, I might not remember all dates with specificity or precisely. I have tried to recall some of my experiences by linking them to memorable occasions in my life however some of the dates remain inaccurate, these dates should be treated as an approximation and not definitive timeline.

5. I have been in and out of Hospital on many occasions throughout my life for a multitude of reasons, therefore it is difficult to attribute a specific incident or illness to a specific date. I have some tribulations about making a statement today as I will be recalling some traumatic experiences that have occurred to me in particular in losing my pregnancies. Having a child has been all I have ever wanted and this journey along with my health, has been a very dramatic for me. I was referred to the Inquiry through the Hepatitis C Trust.

Section 2. How Affected

6. On 2 December 1989 I had an Ectopic pregnancy. Unfortunately, this pregnancy caused one of my fallopian tubes to burst. I went to the Odstock Hospital in Salisbury, which has now become the Salisbury District Hospital and is an NHS Trust Hospital.

7. On arrival to the Hospital I was taken in for an emergency operation. The operation involved a laparotomy, where both the foetus and placenta were removed. I was advised when waking up from the surgery by a female nurse, that during the operation I had lost a lot of blood, haemorrhaged and therefore needed a blood transfusion.

8. I also remember the nurse explaining I had needed the anti-D injection on top of the blood transfusion. The purpose of the anti-D injection was to ensure that harmful antibodies are not developed from the mixing of mine and the foetus blood, as I am rhesus-negative. I was in pain, and had drips attached to me. One of the bags was filled with a clear fluid and would be changed for medications, another bag was dark coloured and appeared to be blood. These were fixed to my arm and hand.

9. I do not remember much more of this experience as I was in shock, grieving for my lost pregnancy and concerned that I would not be able to have a baby in the future.

10. I was discharged one week after my operation. I was very distraught mentally and emotionally as I really wanted to be able to have a baby. The medical staff arranged an outpatient appointment for me to be checked and I was also referred to a psychiatrist for counselling. In addition I was referred back to my GP.

11. I have never had any other blood transfusion prior or after the transfusion which occurred on 2 December 1989. As a consequence to the blood transfusion at Salisbury Hospital I was infected with Hepatitis C.

12. During the next ten years, I was very unwell. I will set out the symptoms and illnesses that I suffered below.

13. I suffered from skin problems, such as eczema and psoriasis. My skin would be really dry and itchy, occasionally lumps would come up in random places, such as on my legs, scalp, arms and chest. Some of these lumps would need to be removed surgically and I would usually be left with scars.

14. The itching would be so bad, it would drive me insane. It felt like there were bugs under my skin. Often, I would need to wear gloves to bed,

to ensure that I would not scratch myself during my sleep. Sometimes I would scratch myself to the point of bleeding.

15. A rash would flare up over my body, and it would be so painful. I would not be able to walk, and would have to wear very light cotton clothes as anything heavier would further irritate the rash and skin.

16. My nails and hair became very brittle. My hair would not grow and became very thin. It would continuously split.

17. I was chronically tired all the time, I could have slept all day. I was literally exhausted from doing the simplest of tasks. I could fall asleep at a drop of a hat. I was constantly fighting the need to fall asleep. My family would have to help me with all daily tasks, such as caring for my animals.

18. I would have brain fog, as if my brain was not fully functioning. I would not be able to concentrate, it was really difficult to focus. I remember I would go into town and have moments of clarity where I would see something that had been there for ages that I just had not previously seen. As soon as I would feel like my mind was functioning properly again the brain fog would come back for months and years.

19. I had pains in my joints. Especially pain in my fingers, knees and neck. These would be sudden sharp shooting pains and constant aches. I also suffered from restless legs, when I would go to bed, my legs wouldn't stop aching and would kick out throughout the night, I could never get comfortable.

20. My appetite was very small, I barely ate. I lived off toast and Ready Brek. Whenever I tried to eat healthily with fruit and vegetables, I would be sick and vomit. The doctors did not understand and would advise me on how important it was to eat a healthy diet if I wanted to have more energy. The doctors did not understand that my body was not able to digest healthy food. I would become constipated and vomit.

21. I was very depressed. There would be times where I felt I could get through life and go out, but then there would be other times where I felt I was in a low trough and would be struggling again. I did not want to go out and socialise, I could not put makeup on because my skin was too sensitive, I could not do my hair it was so brittle and I had no energy. I would really find it a strenuous effort to see my friends.

22. I would seek help from the GP for my depression. Occasionally I would go to counselling where the depression may get better for a while, but I would then spiral down into a trough again. The GPs would tend to focus on the fact that I did not have a child or a baby. Everything would be focused on that, as opposed to what the symptoms could be indicating.

23. The doctors I saw throughout this ten-year period, would relate my problems and my symptoms to my gynaecological issues and depression. The symptoms that I suffered for ten years have persisted in whole and part, right up to today.

24. In 1998, I still was not well and my symptoms aforementioned, continued to be a daily struggle. I had a routine blood test to look at my kidneys and liver. This was ordered by local GP, Doctor Thompson, who was based in Kelverdon, Essex. The test came back showing that my liver enzymes were up and that my liver was not functioning properly.

25. Dr Thompson then referred me to Colchester General Hospital, and I was under the care of Consultant Professor Cowan, who worked in the gastrological department.

26. I saw Professor Cowan for the first time in 1999 at Colchester General Hospital. He wanted me to undergo further blood tests for my liver and kidney. He further referred me through to Professor Knowels for my stomach and bowel digestive problems at Kings College Hospital.

27. I got a call from my GP regarding the results of the tests I had undertaken at Colchester General Hospital. I went in and met with Dr Thompson who advised that the blood tests showed that I had the Hepatitis C virus. I was further advised that I would be contacted by Professor Cowan for an appointment and that I would receive a letter regarding arrangement for a liver biopsy. Dr Thompson was nice, but I did not really understand what was going on. I left the Doctor's office in shock, ignorant of what I was infected with, I had brain fog and it was all a bit of a blur.

28. I went to my second appointment with Professor Cowan, in the period of 1999-2000. He clarified what Hepatitis C was, and asked *"Where I may have been infected from?"* I advised that I only had a blood transfusion in 1989 for the Ectopic pregnancy.

29. Professor Cowan explained what would happen during the liver biopsy and what the treatment was. He further explained that the treatment was not available to everyone and that the biopsy would give further indication as to what treatment would be appropriate. He informed me that the biopsy would be discussed with other doctor's in a panel forum.

30. Professor Cowan provided me a pamphlet which explained how Hepatitis C was infectious and was given plenty of information to prevent others around me from being infected. I was also advised that if I was to have a child, there would only be a small risk that the baby would be infected with Hepatitis C.

31. I went to a library and checked a book out about Hepatitis C, as I did not fully understand what the virus was. The book really scared me. I would have liked to have been given all the information with regards to Hepatitis C and how it would affect me from my GP, at the initial stage of being diagnosed.

32. I feel that at the time there was not enough public understanding of what having Hepatitis C was like. Many people including my friends and family wrongly assumed I was infected with HIV.

33. I continued to see Professor Cowan every 6 months and I would discuss my symptoms and possible treatment. During these six monthly appointments they did scan my liver 2 or 3 times to see if there were any enlarged masses in my liver. The outcome of the liver scans was not of significance. I did not have a liver biopsy until February 2002, as I fell pregnant through IVF which so postponed the biopsy.

34. In 2001 through IVF I became pregnant. I had been implanted with two embryos, one of which was lost early on in the pregnancy. The pregnancy was hard, I was still suffering from all the symptoms of Hepatitis C, many of these symptoms at the time were just brushed off as a difficult pregnancy.

35. I had my treasured son on GRO-C 2001. This was a difficult time. I was told by medical staff that there was very little chance of my son being infected with Hepatitis C from me, especially as I had a Caesarean section. GRO-C GRO-C

36. GRO-C

37. GRO-C

38. On 15 February 2002 I had an outpatient appointment at Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge, where the liver biopsy was performed in the day ward. I was in a gown, lying in a bed where Professor Cowan had a massive needle and punched my liver in order to extract a little piece of it. I was advised I to stay very still or else I could bleed to death. It was scary and unpleasant. I was discharged that same day.

39. After the biopsy I got a letter to attend an appointment with Professor Cowan. At the appointment I was told that there was some inflammation and some scarring on my liver.

40. During the next period between 2002 and 2008 I was becoming very ill and my symptoms were getting worse. I was having more pain in my stomach and pelvis area. I was still meeting with a Professor Knowels to address my bowel and stomach issues at Kings College Hospital. I was diagnosed with bowel immobility, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis, arthritis and a slipped disc in my back as well as an injury to my vertebrae in my neck. In 2004 I had a total hysterectomy. These medical issues were dealt with by Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford. Throughout this period, I would continue to have my 6 monthly consultations with Professor Cowan in relation to my Hepatitis C.

41. Due to my other health problems, which I have listed above I was unable to seek treatment for Hepatitis C. However, every 6 months there would be a review process where Doctors would discuss which patients would be eligible for the Hepatitis C treatment. Each time the review panel reviewed my case, they would advise that treatment would not be beneficial to me.

42. In 2008 I had another liver biopsy, which showed that there had been no change to my liver since the first biopsy in 2002. After this biopsy the 6 monthly appointments with Professor Cowan continued.

43. In 2013 I underwent a third biopsy, this biopsy was more painful as a student Doctor attempted to complete the biopsy and missed my liver, the Consultant had to take over.

44. In 2013 I went to Addenbrookes Hospital where they took my blood. Professor Cowan had retired and I was now being treated by a female Consultant, I cannot recall her name. This new Consultant discussed how my symptoms of joint pain, problems with my digestive system, gynaecological issues and exhaustion could all be related to the Hepatitis C infection.

45. The Consultant advised that I was now eligible for treatment. She told me what the treatment involved, how I would need to inject myself and that it would last 6 months. I would need to undergo a daily blood test to ensure that the treatment was working and to ensure that the dose I was receiving was correct. I was given a sharp's box for disposal of the used needles. The Consultant was very kind and explained the possible side effects of the treatment as being, vomiting, rashes, headaches, tiredness, and pain at the site of the injection. The drugs I was on were Ribavirin and Pegylated Interferon.

46. I started the treatment in February 2012, after a couple of weeks I got a really bad rash. This rash was all over my body, I swelled up like a balloon, I was red and raw. This rash has left scars on my body. I went to my GP, Dr Sai Sanker, of Priory Road, Bicknacre, Chelmsford, Essex. Dr Sanker gave me some creams to soothe the rash. I rang and saw the Consultant at Addenbrookes Hospital who advised me to stop the treatment until the rash cleared up.

47. The rash took 12 weeks to clear up, I started the treatment for the second time in July 2013. The first few months of treatment went well, I tried to stay positive for my son and I did not get a new rash. The second half of the treatment was a nightmare, I was so tired and exhausted. I was vomiting all the time to the point where I didn't think I

would be able to take my tablets. I was continuing to feel the same aches and pains, nothing was improving.

48. I finished the treatment at the end of 2013. The hospital re-ran my bloods on the last scheduled appointment. I was rung up that day by my usual Consultant and she told me over the phone that I had cleared the Hepatitis C virus. She further informed me that my results showed that I was free from the virus from week 4 of the treatment, but that the process was to continue the treatment to ensure the virus did not return. I have not received an official letter stating that I am officially Hepatitis C virus free. Once I was advised that I was virus free, there has been no follow up.

49. My general health has not improved, in some cases it has gotten considerably worse. My Hepatitis C symptoms such as fatigue, rashes and joint pain have not improved. Whilst I am pleased that I am now clear of the Hepatitis C virus, the residual damage has been done and I am still in pain.

50. I do wish I had been treated earlier, I may not be in the pain I am in, if the Hepatitis C virus had been cleared sooner. There were also so many liver biopsies, with the constant fear that I would bleed to death if the biopsy went wrong.

Section 3. Other Infections

51. I do not believe that I contracted any infection other than Hepatitis C as a result of the blood transfusion in 1989.

Section 4. Consent

52. I do not believe that I was tested and treated without my knowledge and consent.

53. I was treated and tested without being given full information. This happened with regards to the testing for Hepatitis C, I was aware that I was being tested for my liver and kidney function. However I was not fully aware I was being tested specifically for Hepatitis C.

54. I have been tested for research purposes. During my treatment for Hepatitis C I was part of a study. It was a long-term study of patients with Hepatitis C. The study was concerned with identifying reasons why some patients are able to clear infection spontaneously, whilst in others the infection becomes chronic, and also why some patients respond well to therapy but others do not. The study planned to look at genetic make-up of a large number of patients who had once been infected with HCV.

55. All that was involved was taking a blood sample, and completing a short questionnaire. The research project was run by Dr Graeme Alexander a Consultant Hepatologist. I choose to take part in the study as I thought it was a good thing to do. I did not get any feedback as to the outcome of the study.

Section 5. Impact

56. My mental health was hugely affected by Hepatitis C. When I first found out that I was infected, I did my own research and it scared me, I thought I was going to die.

57. During the treatment of the Hepatitis C, I was so worried I was going to die that I wrote a death book. This was similar to a will, it included things like how I wanted my funeral to be and details of financial accounts for my son. It also included more personal things such as letters to loved ones, like my brother and other friends. I wrote poems as well. The death book was for people to understand how I was feeling at the time.

58. What really concerned me during this time was that I thought that those who died with Hepatitis C had to be buried in a big yellow bio hazard

bag. I was very upset that I would not be able to buried in a wicker basket, like I wanted.

59. I was also very depressed and at times the only thing keeping me from killing myself was my son.

60. Physically having Hepatitis C impacted me immensely. I was always poorly, and was very ill as I have described throughout paragraphs 13 to 20.

61. Socially, having Hepatitis C affected me greatly. I have referred to this in paragraph 21. I was always in fear as to how people would react. It has affected my relationships throughout the years with partners and with friends. People did not believe I had contracted this horrible disease through no fault of my own. I was given contaminated blood, which I never asked for. Everything that went wrong started from that point.

62. I feel there is a stigma surrounding people infected with Hepatitis C, I recall feeling judged when I would go to the Hepatology Department at the hospital, and I would judge others too. Prisoners were in there receiving treatment. Hepatitis C is viewed as a dirty disease that you contract from doing drugs. People immediately think that I have been a drug addict, they think I have lived a certain lifestyle.

63. Due to the hepatitis C I have always been ill, and at times I have been too ill to work. People have made condescending comments, such that "*I haven't worked a day in my life*." These offhand comments can be hurtful.

64. I recall one incident that really hurt me, when my at the time sister in-law found out I was infected with Hepatitis C, she yelled at me *"We all know you have AIDS*". She collected her children who had been staying with me. Her reason for this was that my house was contaminated. This really hurt me and over the years I have tried to explain what has

happened to me through letters, as she is still my son's Aunty, but she refuses to read them.

65. Other incidences of stigma have come up, such as my own parents always set aside specific cutlery for me, even though I have explained Hepatitis C cannot be transmitted through cutlery. These are the things that make me feel different. Peoples lack of knowledge causes them make hurtful assumptions.

66. My family has been impacted by this infection significantly. The diagnosis devastated my parents, they have had to be my support network and especially to my son.

67. Throughout my son's life he has had a sick mum, he has had to help care for me, he has had to push me around in a wheel chair. That is not the life I wanted to spend with my son, who is the only thing I ever wanted. Now my son is not even concerned by me having to go to hospital, it has become normal, as he is so used to his mum having to go to hospital all the time.

68. **GRO-C**

69. My private relationships have been affected by the Hepatitis C infection, all my partners have wanted to be my saviour and as they have not been able to fix my illnesses, the relationship did not work out.

70. I have faced many difficulties and obstacles in accessing treatments while being infected with Hepatitis C. I recall making a dentist appointment and being told I had to be the last appointment of the day so that everything could be covered up. This reaction made me feel uncomfortable, I changed dentists after that.

71. Having a baby was the most important thing in my life. In 2000 I needed to go through IVF, I really struggled to find a Hospital that would help me as they were all concerned about my Hepatitis C infection. When I finally found a private Hospital in Colchester, Oak Hospital, they advised that I would need to have my eggs transferred and mixed with the sperm when there were no other patients being treated in that department of the hospital. This was to ensure no infection would be transmitted to other patients. It was devasting that they felt I was so infectious.

72. While I was in hospital after the birth of my son I was put into a separate room as not to infect the other mothers and babies. Throughout many of my hospital stays, I have been put in a separate room due to the chance of infection for other patients of Hepatitis C.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

73. In the past I have gone to counselling, but have not found it very helpful. However, the Inquiry has now made me aware of the work the British Red Cross are undertaking to assist those who have been infected by the contaminated blood scandal. I have been provided with the British Red Cross' counselling details and I will consider whether I will access this service.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

74. I have not received any financial assistance from any Trusts or Funds set up to distribute payments.

75. I have applied to the Skipton Fund once and was denied and I lodged a further appeal which was also denied. This was during the period 2001-2002. This application was rejected for lack of evidence of a blood transfusion.

76. I have also applied to England Infected Blood Scheme (EIBSS) and was denied again due to having no actual evidence of a blood transfusion having occurred. I disagree with this as some of my GP notes refer to there being a blood transfusion and my notes from Salisbury Hospital have been destroyed. I have been advised that I can appeal the decision and will look into this.

77. Due to the destruction of my medical notes I am deprived of any such support which would be a Godsend all because of somebodies' failings in keeping my medical documents.

78. In an attempt to be eligible for the funds and trusts, I have done a lot of work requesting all my medical documentation from all the GP practices and Hospitals I have been at. This has been a very time-consuming process especially while I have been sick. All my medical records have been supplied, except those from the Salisbury Hospital. I know why Salisbury Hospital do not have my medical notes because they destroyed them. They gave me infected blood and they don't want to be seen to be culpable.

79. I think the financial schemes and trusts have been set up to work against people like me. If these schemes and trusts can get away with not paying, they will not pay. The money is not a lot but it would definitely help me. I do not think it is enough money, when you are talking about somebody's life This Hepatitis C has affected all areas of my body, why would somebody like me have all these things in her body getting ill.

Section 8. Other Issues

80. I have sought information regarding contracting Hepatitis C from a blood transfusion from my local MP at the time, John Whitingdale. In April 2010 he responded with the following;

81. *"I was very sorry to learn that you contracted Hepatitis C in 1989 and can fully understand your concern that the files relating to your operation were subsequently destroyed by the hospital in question. I can appreciate that this is hampering your claim for compensation.*
I am very happy to try to help you with this but I will need much more information such as the name of the hospital which treated you and then lost your records, a copy of their letter of apology which you mention and any other information that you can provide."

82. This response of John Whitingdale, made me feel that he understood what I was going through. I was not well at the time and did not respond. The matter was not progressed.

83. I also wrote an email to Prime Minister Gordon Brown in April 2010, highlighting the difficulties I had been having with regards to my health. I received a response, stating that my email was going to be attended to. I do not recall getting further correspondence regarding the matter.

84. I have suffered from having Hepatitis C. I have been stigmatised. My family has been affected, my son has been affected GRO-C. This inquiry is a little too late, so many people have died because of this mistake. The Government cut corners buying infected blood. I want an apology for all the people who have been infected, this Hepatitis C came from somewhere.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 10 June 19