

Witness Name: CLAIRE LOUISE DIXON

Statement No: WITN5517001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: FEBRUARY 2021

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CLAIRE LOUISE DIXON

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I, CLAIRE LOUISE DIXON, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Claire Louise Dixon. I was born on GRO-C 1971 and I live at GRO-C  
GRO-C
2. My mother, Nora Worthington (born on GRO-C 1946), was infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from a transfusion of contaminated blood. She died from bowel cancer on GRO-C 1993, aged 47.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of full access to my mother's medical records.

## **Section 2. How affected**

4. My mother (Mum) was given a blood transfusion following a perforated duodenal ulcer at the Macclesfield District General Hospital (MDGH) in July 1982. She was not told that she had become infected with HIV through the blood transfusion until 1991. The Department of Health issued a payment of £43,500 to mum in November 1992 as a single adult following the instruction, advice and support sought from NW based solicitors, J Keith Park & Co.

## **Section 3. Other Infections**

5. I do not believe that my mother was infected with anything other than HIV.

## **Section 4. Consent**

6. My mother was not warned of risk of infection and was not in a position to give informed consent prior to having the blood transfusion. I was 11 years old at the time. On 10<sup>th</sup> July 1982 I had discovered my mother in a pool of blood at the foot of the stairs of the family home: GRO-C I immediately called for an ambulance for her. She was rushed to MDGH and received a blood transfusion on an emergency basis for a perforated duodenal ulcer. Mum was in hospital for several days. Following treatment and discharge things went back to normal for her. She was unaware of any risk associated with her treatment.

## **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

7. Mum, my brother Stephen and I were a very close family unit. My father left the family home in 1973 when I was just 18 months old and mum became a single parent. Despite receiving no financial support from my father mum worked incredibly hard to provide for Stephen and myself. Initially we had lived in a council flat but mums perseverance and determination ensured we secured a run-down council house, GRO-C in the late 1970's. Eventually, to her eternal pride, mum was able to purchase this property and transform it into the family home she had always dreamed of. Mum's health began to deteriorate in the late 1980s when she sought treatment for gynecological problems. Her problems seemed to accelerate and she began to look unwell in the early 1990s, noticing a loss of weight and generally feeling unwell. In 1991 mum went away on holiday to Greece with her partner Eddie. On her return my uncle collected them from the airport. I had a terrible shock at how she looked when they returned home and I opened the door to her. She had become so poorly whilst away. She looked thin and emaciated and was exhausted and weak. I put mum to bed and immediately telephoned the doctor. The doctor came out to mum and wasn't sure what was wrong. She was admitted to intensive care at MDGH with suspected Legionnaires Disease (presumed to have been picked up on holiday). Eventually mum was diagnosed with pneumonia. We were informed she was 'critically ill' and believed she might die.
8. Fortunately mum recovered sufficiently to be moved on to a general ward and we continued to visit her there. I turned up one day to quite a shock as she wasn't in the ward cubicle as expected. To cut a long story short, she had been from the general ward into a side room. I did not understand the significance of that at the time. I believe mum had been told at this point that she had been infected with HIV/AIDS. At this point she didn't tell either myself or anyone else about it, but I saw a profound change in her whole demeanor. She wasn't right and seemed to be dazed and in shock. I remember asking her where Eddie (her partner) was. She said he had left and would not be coming back. Her only explanation was to

simply say 'It didn't work out'. Following her discharge from hospital, mum was very down, but we didn't know why or what was happening. Frequent hospital visits and tests seemed to be the norm once she was discharged.

9. Mum finally told Stephen and I that she was infected with HIV in the summer of 1992. I remember with clarity coming home with my friend, Sarah, one day and hearing my brother sobbing outside the house as we came up the street. She had clearly told Stephen the true diagnosis. Mum ushered us into the house pulled us in, sat me and Sarah down at the table and told us 'I have cancer'. It was, of course, a terrible shock and I was in tears all night.
10. The next morning, I found my Mum in her dressing gown in front of the TV and she was just breaking her heart. She said to me 'I have not told you the truth. I have AIDS'. She was distraught. She explained that she had been contaminated through a blood transfusion in 1982. She apologized for claiming she had cancer as she did not want anyone else to know her true diagnosis. She explained she had tried to deal with her HIV diagnosis on her own in order to protect Stephen and I. She was very scared. It was so hard for my mother because she thought people would perceive her as 'dirty'. Public perception and understanding of the disease was very different in the early 1990s. AIDS was synonymous with homosexuals and many referred to it as 'the gay disease'. There was so much fear and stigma surrounding it all and mum feared if her condition were openly discussed people would not only judge her but Stephen and I could be targeted and suffer. Mum prided herself on being a strong independent single parent and practicing catholic with strong moral values and was very well respected both at work and within the local community. It was at this point that I begged her to inform the close family. After initially being very reticent she agreed to contact her two closest sisters, Margaret Lawton and Maureen Barker for support. However, she was adamant she did not want to share her diagnosis with my grandmother or any other siblings or family members.

11. Mum felt she was treated very badly by the medical profession. She referred to some of the subsequent treatment as humiliating and degrading. Following the diagnosis in 1991 she had to attend a GUM clinic for her HIV treatment/medication. I recall one particular incident when she was seen attending one of the GUM clinics by an individual she knew locally. Mum was so distressed that she subsequently organised for one of the GUM staff to allow her to collect her medication from a local supermarket car park. On another occasion she was so distraught after being admitted to Monsall Isolation Hospital in North Manchester for treatment only to discover she was the only female on the HIV ward that we were seriously concerned for mum's mental health. Mum became increasingly socially withdrawn and invested her diminishing energies into our family unit. Mum believed that she was purposefully kept in the dark about the contaminated blood transfusion and the HIV diagnosis. She felt sure that the medical professionals knew. Mums health issues came to a head in early 1993. After attending a series of appointments at MDGH (Dr Khan's clinic) complaining of rectal pain and discomfort mum was referred back to her GP ( Dr Young )for treatment of piles. Mums GP immediately organised an urgent same day appointment with an alternative consultant. Within a period of a few days mum was diagnosed with a rectal cancerous tumour and referred to Christies Cancer Hospital in Manchester. Mums unexplained health issues from the late 1980s and numerous hospital visits were suddenly brought into sharp focus. Mum always believed earlier diagnosis of her infection meant that treatment could have been undertaken to prolong her life. It is so sad that nothing was done. I subsequently learnt that bowel cancer, amongst other cancers, is prevalent in people with HIV due to their low immune system.
12. Mum felt she was given very little information about HIV and was scared. She stopped keeping her toothbrush in the bathroom. She was always very affectionate, but she changed little habits to keep some physical distance between us. She changed so much. She never went anywhere. She just wanted to keep herself to herself. I remember another of Mum's sister's coming to the door when Mum was ill and Mum saying 'Don't answer the door'. Mum's two-year relationship

with Eddie had disintegrated in 1991 as soon as he learned of the HIV diagnosis. Eddie had said to her 'You could have passed it to me' and we never saw him again. She was left to struggle on in fear on her own. On top of everything, she had to continue to try to hold down a job and deal with her eventual cancer.

13. The fear really set in when she was admitted to Christies Hospital in 1993 and she knew that she was going to die. Apart from two of my mum's sisters all the family knew was that she had cancer. It all happened so quickly. I think the biggest shock to her was the knowledge that for all those years she had been left in the dark and robbed of the opportunity of life saving treatment. I too believe she could have been OK and with us to this day otherwise.
14. On her discharge from Christies Hospital mum came home. I asked her doctor how long she had left and was told two weeks. I said that two weeks would be too hard for her as she was suffering too much, and he made some calls. The doctor found a hospice for her albeit they had never had an AIDS patient before and she died there three weeks later.
15. I am now married, and I have a son and daughter, aged 23 and 16 respectively. My brother has two children, aged 20 and 17. Our children have missed out on having a relationship with their grandmother and she missed out on knowing and enjoying them. Stephen and I have never come to terms with the loss of mum and the tragic circumstances. The fallout and segregation in my mum's family has been awful as it came out years later, at a family party, that my mum had HIV/AIDS. Some of her siblings felt hurt that they were not told. We all remember what my mum went through and what we, as her family, had to go through and it is all a bit too much sometimes. Mum was such a beautiful person inside and out, a kind and exceptionally proud, hardworking and selfless woman...two parents rolled into one. A credit to her family, all she ever wanted to do was to protect her family. I am so very proud of her.

### **Section 6. Treatment/care/support**

16. None of us were offered any counselling.

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

17. My mother received a settlement from the Department of Health totaling £43,500 in 1992, but I do not believe she received any further financial help from any of the trusts and funds.

### **Section 8. Other Issues**

18. The solicitors, J Keith Park, acting for mum before her death may have received partial medical records. I tried to obtain them after Mum died without success. None of the hospitals I wrote to responded to my request.

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

19. I do not wish to be anonymous 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.....

Dated... 18.02.2021 .....