Witness Name: MELANIE CHASE
Statement No:WITN7243001
Exhibits:NIL
Dated: October 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MELANIE CHASE

I, Melanie Chase will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Melanie Chase. I reside a GRO-C GRO-C Gloucestershire, GRO-C My date of birth is GRO-C 1972. I am single, I have 4 sons, the youngest of which is 15 and lives with me.

2. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

Section 2. How infected

3. On 12th July 1990 I had a miscarriage. I was around 4 months pregnant and had to have surgery to remove the foetus. As a result of this I had to stay in hospital over night and I was given a blood transfusion at Kings College Hospital, London.

4. As a result of the blood transfusion, I was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV).

5. I did not find out about the Hepatitis C infection until I had my second child in 1994. I was a single parent and was absolutely exhausted. I was so tired I went to see my GP. I had started a degree course at university as I wanted to be a teacher, I was a single parent and worked as well. My GP told me nothing was wrong, and I was just doing a lot, but I felt it was more than that, I was anaemic, so they did lots of tests and discovered I had been infected with Hepatitis C.

6. I was given the results over the telephone by receptionist, I was so shocked to be given the results like that. I made an appointment with my GP, and he sent me to see someone at the hospital. In the meantime, I was given a number for a support group. I went along and it was a group full of alcoholics and drug addicts, I burst into tears, I was not there because of drugs or alcohol, there was no one there I could relate to, so I never went back.

7. I was given no information. By the time I was informed of the infection, I already had 2 children. I went back home and drank a bottle of vodka an cried my eyes out, I became depressed and upset, we didn't have the internet back then so I could not find out much information. Everything around Hepatitis C was about drug addicts or alcoholics. I was scared. My kid's dad was no longer around, the relationship I had with my parents at the time was not great. I was petrified what would happen to the kids, it was the worst time of my life, and I had no support.

8. I had had 2 children not knowing that I had Hepatitis C, I would not have done that had I known about the infection, I could have passed it on to my children without knowing, I was so worried that I had passed it on to them, GRO-C GRO-C

9. Telling me over the phone about the infection was appalling, at the time I was very fragile, I was physically tired, I would go to the GP reporting symptoms and having Hepatitis C was overlooked, it was like this is that you have got the label so there you go.

10. It was not something I wanted to tell people; I was embarrassed to tell people about it. I still do not tell many people. All of a sudden, I had Hepatitis C stamped all over my records and at appointments I suddenly people were dressed in suits like spacemen at the dentist and hospital. I was thrown into a world of feeling like I was someone with the most disgusting condition.

11. I also treated myself like I was someone with a disgusting condition. I was really scared. All I was given was a leaflet about not sharing needles, nothing that was relevant to me. I had no partner at the time, even so, not enough information was given to me. I ended up keeping myself away from everyone.

Section 3. Other Infections

12. As far as I am aware I only contracted Hepatitis C from the blood transfusion. My medical health is not great, I am battling different things so really don't know if I contracted anything else. I get constant abscesses all over my body that have to be operated on all of the time. I get constant mouth ulcers. In my mouth every day I have at least 6 and I don't know what it is to do with. Generally, I am a healthy poorly person. It is possible it could be connected as these issues started when I had the Interferon and Ribavirin treatment.

Section 4. Consent

13. I don't believe that I was treated without my knowledge or consent. I knew what was happening, but I didn't understand the implications of the tests, they were not really explained very well, I was just told they were taking blood and doing tests. I was not given enough information about what was being tested, I had no concerns whatsoever about Hepatitis or HIV I didn't think it was possible I could have those.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

14. The infection completely changed my life. I was at university, but I was too tired to carry on with my course, so I never got my degree. I have never been able to maintain normal relationships. Because I felt that being infected, I was not good enough or worthy, I had poor mental health and low self-esteem. I was so young when I contracted the infection it made me feel a very insecure person, previously I had been a very secure person, I would have taken life by the horns, I was a happy person and I went to being very unhappy and not letting people close to me, I felt I was not worthy of being associated with good people and that ruined my life. I was then associating with people I felt I was worthy of which were the wrong type of people.

15. I did speak to counsellor on the phone, and I took antidepressants, but even when I was going through the treatment for Hepatitis C there was no care for my mental health, no one was looking after me in the healthcare system. After I had the treatment, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I was so young when this all happened, I am 50 this hear and now able to take on board what I went through.

16. I started to be anaemic after I had the blood transfusion. I then started to bleed constantly in most of my late 20s and into my 30s and so I had a full hysterectomy when I was 36.

17. I was given Interferon and Ribavirin combined for a year to treat the Hepatitis C infection. I had to take medication for a year, starting in April 1999 and inject myself 3 times a week. I had side effects every time I gave myself an injection. I couldn't do anything for 2 days afterwards. I felt like I had the worst case of flu, I only had one day a week without any symptoms from the treatment where I did not feel ill for the whole year I was on treatment. I lost loads of weight; my hair went thin. My memory has been awful since I have had the treatment, so I have to write everything down or else I forget everything.

18. The hospital, St Thomas in London had communications with my GP they said I was ill enough for the treatment but not quite downhill enough to get on it. I was getting scared about whether I was going to die. I had been diagnosed in 1995 and had 4 years of not knowing if there was treatment for me. It was a bit

like they were waving a carrot under my nose. I was told the treatment was very expensive that I couldn't have it, then that I could, I had my bloods re done and they said I then needed treatment now.

19. I was not offered any other type of treatment I was simply put on what they offered.

20. The mental and physical effects of the treatment were awful. I was in a new relationship before I started the treatment, so it changed that relationship. I basically had a whole year of doing nothing at all. I stayed a positive as I could, it was the treatment, or I will die from the condition so I stayed as positive as I could, but I was desperately depressed.

21. I do not go to the dentist now, I was treated badly when I went so, I don't go, I am too embarrassed to go, I do not like going anywhere where I am asked questions. I don't like to think about it or talk about it. I am only doing this now because my mum said I had to, that it was not fair my whole life had been ruined by being given infected blood. It stays with me; it took the best years of my life.

22. My infection did impact my family. My brother didn't walk to talk about it. I lot friends as they didn't want me to pick their kids up from school and play with my kids, they didn't want their kids near mine. My mum spent this whole time worrying about me. The bloke I was with at the time sort of tried to look after me, but he got fed up and treated me like shit so people either wanted not to mention it or they kept away from me or worried about me. I couldn't tell my children when they were little.

23. There was a massive stigma attached to the infection, I totally felt like a lepper and because people didn't know how I had got the infection, people assumed I must have been a drug addict, no one asked me how I got the infection.

24. I had to stop doing my university course because of the infection. I wanted to become a teacher. I was very proud of myself, I had 2 kids, I lived in a council flat, I wasn't the typical pregnant young mum. I went to university when their dad left me to become a teacher, but I had to give that up. I moved out of London

to give my kids the best life. I was so tired and exhausted and then found out I had Hepatitis C. I didn't want to leave the university course, it meant so much to me, but my GP said to me I was not going to pass if I was that tired and doing lots of things badly, so why didn't I just raise my kids properly. I thought oh ok, he is probably right, he could have told me to do anything I was mailable and didn't know what to do. I thought I was going to die so what is the point of being a teacher, I may as well look after the kids and do the best for them, the end goal was going to be worth it.

25. As a result of the infection causing me to leave university, I did not get my degree and go into the profession I had wanted, I ended up working on and off in jobs, and never picked up a career.

26. Financially I am not able to support myself. I have 4 children to 2 different partners. My second kids' dad has been really good at supporting us but when he decided to leave that all went away. I got whatever job I could get to get by, if it was not for my mum helping me out, I don't know what I would do I have currently got a GRO-C

GRO-C

If I was a teacher, I would have been able to do this in a better way than currently.

27. Because of the infection and how it made me feel, I was attracted to the wrong type of people, I was attracted to horrible people because that was all I thought I was worth. I didn't think I was good enough and this has been a theme throughout my adult life since having Hepatitis C. I am single now and do not want to be with anyone else.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

28. I have not faced difficulty getting treatment. Although, initially when I moved out of London it was when I was halfway through my treatment and they said I couldn't have it anymore, I had to fight to continue it as I was 6 months through

the treatment although I had to travel back down to London for treatment and pick up prescriptions so in terms of treatment it was fine. I had all my scans in London.

29. As far as the medical profession looking after me though, they didn't. My GP was never kept in the loop by the hospital. St Thomas' Hospital did not share any information with my GP, so no one was aware of the stage I was at with treatment. There was no follow up, no personal care.

30. I finished treatment in 2000 and my son was born in 2001, I was petrified and wanted answers, was the Hepatitis C definitely out of my system? Will he, have it? My third son Harry GRO-C There was no care towards me for how I was feeling. When my fourth son was born in France, I needed to give my full medical history, the medical staff wore gloves and masks, it was as if they didn't know that Hepatitis C could be cured, I was made to feel like a leper all over again. When GRO-C GRO-C, and I threw up on the spot. I was called in to discuss the results and was physically sick, it was like a ton of bricks had hit me. I did not realise and had not been told that there would be GRO-C GRO-C I was so frightened at that point, it was awful, it brought it all back and I was depressed again.

31. I have never been offered counselling or psychological support apart from that one group I went to that was not appropriate. Nothing else was offered to me.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

32. I have not received any financial assistance or support at all. I did not know about the Trusts and Funds that had been set up. When I was having treatment, they made me feel like I was the luckiest person on the plant, they would say not many get to the end of the treatment, the nurse would say to me 50% have dropped out now you are lucky to be carrying on or another 10% have gone this month, they made me feel like I should be grateful.

Section 8. Other Issues

33. I think the most important point for me is that my life has been totally different to how it should have been had I not been infected. I would have been a different parent; I would have chosen better partners and therefore fathers for my children. As a result of the infection, I suffered with low self-esteem, I was made to feel like a scum bag, a leper. I had my kids with horrible men that don't have anything to do with them. I would have had a better life had I not been infected, I have beautiful kids, but my kids have suffered from the decisions I made as a result of being infected. I would have been a teacher; we would have had a better standard of living. We live in a beautiful place now, but I wouldn't tell a sole that I had been infected with Hepatitis C, people here are too judgmental.

34. It is important to keep in mind my age when I was infected, I was 18 years old when I had the blood transfusion which infected me, and I was in my early 20s when I found out about the infection, so it has impacted my whole life from when I was very young.

Anonymity

35. I do not wish to remain anonymous.

36. I do want to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.. GRO-C ....

Dated 26/11/2022.