Witness Name: Frederick Harding
Statement No.: WITN7334001
Exhibits; Nil
Dated: 6/1/23

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF FREDERICK HARDING

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 10 November 2022.

I, Frederick Harding, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Frederick Harding. My date of birth is GRO-C 1961 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am in a long-term relationship with my partner and am a father of 4 including a step-child. At present I run a park café in London.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV) following blood transfusions I received during surgery after involvement in a road traffic accident. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact of infection on myself and my family.

3. I am happy for the Inquiry to assist me and I can confirm that I am not legally represented. The provisions regarding anonymity have been explained to me and I am happy for my story to be in the public domain.

4. This statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my medical records following the accident. I have been informed that my medical records from Greenwich Hospital were transferred to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital when Greenwich was demolished and then destroyed in line with their protocol of only retaining patient files for 7 years post-treatment. My GP also has no records relating to my accident.

Section 2. How Infected

5. When I was 16, I was involved in a serious moped accident. I suffered multiple leg fractures and was taken to Greenwich Hospital by ambulance. I had two operations to insert a metal plate into my left leg, in the course of which I believe I received blood transfusions. The area had to be prepared for the plate to be inserted and I had initial operation in readiness for that. I was in hospital for a month in total.

6. I have limited memory of this period, though I do recall arriving in the ambulance and remember some visits by friends and family. I believe I have tried to push these memories from my mind as I do find it difficult to discuss the accident and therefore cannot be certain of dates of specific events and some details referred to within this statement.

7. I have no specific recollection of seeing blood bags or bottles of blood, but I do recall having a drip in my arm which may have been intravenous pain relief. I remember seeing the drip and a splint on my arm and exclaiming that 'It's not my arm that the problem'.

8. I have had no serious medical problems that have required blood transfusions and only had one other minor operation on polyp in my nostril.

9. My Mother was my accompanying adult at Greenwich Hospital. I don't believe that she was informed of any risks, information or advice associated with blood transfusions and I believe that she would have informed me if she was as I was 16 at the time of accident. I myself was never informed that I may need blood or about any risks attached if I did so.

10. Following recovery from my accident, life carried on as normal. I later signed up as a blood donor with the National Blood Transfusion Service (NHBT) and donated on multiple occasions, potentially up to 6 times. As shown in documents linked to my Skipton application, I donated blood in July of 1997 which was subsequently tested and my GP, Dr Butler, was informed shortly afterwards that my donation had tested positive for Hepatitis C (HCV).

11. In the late 1990s, I went to Greenwich Christ Church to give blood as I had done on multiple occasions. Shortly after I gave my donation, I received a letter from St. George's Hospital Tooting instructing me to book a visit to speak to a councillor. I was very concerned by the nature of the letter and due to the publicity at the time around the HIV crisis, I was worried that I may have contracted HIV which was very common at this point, so I immediately feared the worst.

12. I went to St. George's Hospital for my appointment with a councillor and I was then informed that I had contracted Hepatitis C. I cannot recall if I was offered any guidance or if any advice was offered at the time and I was subsequently referred back to my GP. I had no knowledge of HCV and was totally shocked when given the diagnosis as I had no idea as to how I may have become infected

13. The treatment I received for Hepatitis C was very good. From my GP I was referred to the liver department a Kings College Hospital, Denmark Hill (KCH) for treatment. I am unsure when exactly I received my first

round of treatment, but I had visited KCH a few times before I began the treatment programme. I had been subject to a lot of biopsies over the period following my diagnosis with no significant news from the biopsies being reported. I had assumed that the state of my liver wasn't great with the HCV, but that it wasn't in too critical a state either.

14. I found the biopsies uncomfortable and painful at times, but tolerable. Between the accident and my first visit to St. George's, I did not notice any symptoms and I felt normal up until my HCV diagnosis was made. I have now been made aware that the Hepatitis C strain was genotype 2b.

15. I received no advice in relation to testing my partner for HCV at St. Georges. The only advice and guidance, I received was at Kings College Hospital and related to misinformation and issues to be aware of like not sharing toothbrushes. My partner at the time was tested for HCV but the children were not. Subsequently, I encouraged my children to donate blood as an important thing to do but also as a means of having medical testing done. I believe my children still regularly donate blood and nothing abnormal has surfaced.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. As far as I am aware, I have never contracted an infection other than HCV. I have not been tested for HIV, although I would imagine that this is included in any blood donation test.

Section 4. Consent

17. My blood was screened by the Blood Transfusion Service which I believe I signed a waiver for when I signed up as a donor. I therefore believe my blood was tested with my consent although I don't specifically recall any mention of HCV, albeit it was many years ago. I consented to all of my treatment for the infection.

Section 5. Impact

18. Throughout the time of my diagnosis and subsequent treatment, I tried to minimise the impact on my psychological wellbeing. I played the impact of my infection down in my mind as a coping mechanism. As a result, I experienced no sense of euphoria when the treatment was ultimately successful. I told my partner that the treatment was successful in an ambivalent tone, she exclaimed 'shouldn't we be celebrating?'. I tried to distance myself from the infection psychologically as I didn't want to contemplate the serious risks to my health or the prospect of death, which at one stage I thought was a real possibility.

19. I have always had faith in the medical professionals and any concerns and worries I have had went away post treatment being made available to me. I never received any guarantees from the Doctors or nursing staff at KCH, but the Doctors were very hopeful of the success of the combination therapy.

20. As a self-employed individual working within the building sector at the time, there was a substantial impact on my finances. I was off work for the duration of my treatment. Having to go to Kings fortnightly was very disruptive to my business and finances and alienated some colleagues and customers and made them wary of me. I felt a similar wariness as those infected with AIDS in the early days, especially from colleagues. I told colleagues that I was HCV positive as I felt it was my duty to do. The physical risks within building sites increased the need to share my HCV status.

21. Following my diagnosis, I got in touch with all of my previous girlfriends as I felt a very strong obligation to inform them of my infection. This increased some of the pre-existing aggravation with ex-partners and some ex-partners found this news distressing. One ex-partner was an A&E nurse and was therefore aware of HCV, she was very concerned and extremely upset. It wasn't the nicest feeling giving them the news

however, I believe I did the right thing and that people had a right to know for their own safety and the safety of those around them.

22. Generally, people close to me were supportive. I think the common consensus around Hepatitis C was that it's bad but not really bad- it was seen as something you got unluckily from a holiday – maybe some people mixed it up and did not fully understand the disease! I did not experience any loss of friendships or relationships with family, as far as I know. I had no suspicions people were isolating themselves from me as a result of my infection including at work. My family were very supportive throughout the diagnosis and treatment. Similarly, there was no impact on my social life, apart from during the year of treatment.

23. In terms of the impact on my family, my oldest daughter was about 12 the time and my younger children 4 and 5. The children were not made aware of my infection. My partner at the time was left to get on with everything family related throughout my treatment. As discussed, in relation to the psychological impact, my policy was to make light of the whole situation, my partner at the time was very concerned by this. I don't, however, think this impacted on the eventual break up of our relationship. The time of my diagnosis, treatment and subsequent results was a very stressful time. Everyone was cautious and looking up details online and became very knowledgeable on the subject.

24. On occasions I did feel stigmatised because of my condition. Similar to the way HIV and AIDS sufferers were viewed, I felt that some people were wary around me. I often found that HCV was conflated with being a drug user. I was never shy or reserved about discussing my infection, if it came up in conversation. It was quite easy to tell a change in certain people's demeanour after I discussed my infection. I would declare my condition to everyone. At the dentist, I would have to confirm my medical history on each visit. I did not experience any difficulties in this regard once I had made it clear that I had HCV in the past.

25. In respect of me being cured of HCV, I don't believe I feel absolutely 'cured'. I am still ineligible for donating blood so I am still wary of cuts and bleeding as if I am still infected. That careful nature in regard to infection and not infecting others has remained, especially whilst I'm working on building sites. I have been and will, always, be very pragmatic and careful around risks.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

26. I believe that I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time. I was put on a treatment programme of combination therapy of Ribavirin and Interferon treatment. I am not certain on the exact time of treatment but I believe it was during the mid to late 90s. I was aware that it was a fairly new combination of treatment and I was fortunate to be offered it.

27. The Ribavirin-Interferon combination therapy lasted about 6 months with the main treatment lasting 3 months and subsequent follow ups lasting roughly 3 months. I was taught how to administer the treatment at home by staff at KCH, self-administering one injection per week into my stomach and thighs alternately. During and after the initial treatment programme, I went to KCH every two weeks for over a year. It became part of my routine, Tuesday visits to Kings. As far as I know, the treatment was entirely successful.

28. It was emphasised to me by various Hospital staff at Kings that I should try and minimise risks to myself. I was informed of low risks of other people catching HCV from me as I was asymptomatic, which was also a reason why I was eligible for the combination treatment

29. The Doctors listed and explained the side effects associated with the treatment at the beginning of the programme. With my view of downplaying the situation, I had assumed that side–effects wouldn't be an issue. I quickly realised that this would not be the case. I experienced severe depression and suffered from a complete lack of motivation. A

typical example of this lack of motivation would be wanting a cup of tea and be physically able to make one, but be completely unable and unmotivated to make myself one. I questioned 'What's the point?' in everything I did. This attitude was very unlike my natural persona. I didn't seek medical support for psychological side effects for the duration of the treatment.

30. I felt tired constantly and didn't have any energy to go to work. I just stayed at home. The treatment lasted 3 months, but I felt this way for roughly a year in total. I had one check-up a month on my liver upon completion of my treatment programme at Kings. I also underwent frequent blood tests throughout to check on my HCV status.

31. Occasionally some of my wounds would reopen during treatment. I have a scar on my leg from the accident that would weep at points. I also had previous cuts on my hands that would open up. I think this was due to the drugs I was given triggering conditions that were previously dormant.

32. Once treatment was completed, most of my symptoms subsided. Throughout the years following treatment I have experienced frequent chest infections. I've had a fairly constant cold and blocked nose which have lasted for years following treatment. I have visited my GP regarding these symptoms, resulting in me being given treatment for allergies which has not been successful. I understand that my immune system has likely been damaged by the HCV and this may be why I have this problem.

33. My bouts of depression and a general feeling of being down remain though but it is something that I deal with myself and I do not involve the medical profession. I have developed my own coping mechanisms over the years.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. I suffered financially during the year of treatment. As I am self-employed it is difficult to quantify, but there was a substantial impact on contracts during my treatment year. My first mortgage with a building society was close to completion in the late 90s or early 2000s, and myself and my partner at the time had to go in for the final signing of forms. There were 4 or 5 people in the room, and we were asked to sign a form which asked for medical histories. This was the first time that health was mentioned within the process. I was obliged to mention my HCV and the whole room went quiet. I felt scared as I was worried my mortgage was going to be lost. It was very much a struggle to get to that position. In the end my HCV status didn't impact the mortgage as I had cleared the HCV by this stage. I had to show proof of successful treatment to the lenders. I was extremely relieved my HCV didn't impact the mortgage in the end.

35. The Skipton fund was mentioned at Kings Hospital by medical staff whilst I was undertaking treatment. I am aware now that I applied for Skipton in November 2008 and was subsequently turned down in December 2008. My application for financial assistance was declined GRO-C GRO-C

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38. When I was refused for the Skipton fund, I didn't overly care. I was encouraged to apply for it, but I wasn't taking compensation for a given. I was not certain of the factors and details involved in any potential challenge to the decision to refuse my application so I left it alone. I was just grateful for the successful treatment and being able to get my life back on track.

Section 8. Other Issues

39. My motivations for giving this statement are not financial. I want to build up my knowledge of HCV and get to grips with the history of my infection. I would like to receive more knowledge on the implications for rest of my life as well as to hear more about the infected blood scheme. I believe that that the time has come for me to address the trauma of previous events in my life in order to move on from my HCV infection.

40. I didn't overly want to talk about it, but I am now in a position to address the events but with difficulty. I still experience bouts of low mood and darkness. In giving this statement, I knowingly left home at the last possible opportunity to come to the meeting and I only got on the train at the last minute as I found recalling the details associated my infection extremely daunting. It has been a struggle to make it here but I am glad I did.

41. My infection has not dented my faith in the NHS, if anything my experience following my successful treatment have increased my faith in the health service. I was on the whole very well treated.

42. Buying infected products from the USA without any testing was careless and unprofessional. The impacts on people's lives have been tragic. I don't' understand how it happened as it is such a basic principle to test blood before giving it to other people.

43. I gave blood before testing positive to HCV and may have put other people at risk of Hepatitis C infection. That is something I have to live with and I feel guilty about the fact but I donated in the best possible faith. I have never been offered psychological support throughout my treatment and infection and I believe it would have been of great help to me personally. I have been surprised by the DIY nature of being infected and coping on your own.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 6/1/23