Witness Name: Benjamin Oliver
Statement No: WITN7344001
Dated: 8th November 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN OLIVER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 7th October 2022. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

I, Benjamin Oliver, will say as follows:-

1.Introduction

1. My name is Benjamin Graham Oliver. My date of birth is GRO-C 1977 and my address is known to the Inquiry.

2. I live on my own. I am not working at this time.

3. I have lived back in the UK since around September 2013.

4. On leaving school in 1993, I spent a significant amount of time working abroad. I worked in Italy and on cruise ships in Scandinavia and for many years I lived and worked in Fuerteventura.

5. In Fuerteventura I worked at various things; I did some building work, worked as a Chef and was involved with windsurfing. I made high quality windsurfing boards and I windsurfed myself to a very high standard.

6. In 1998/99 I began to have ankle problems and suffered multiple bleeds from my snowboarding activities. In January 2000, I suffered a further injury to my ankle which also probably related to my snowboarding. I had both ankles operated on in 2012 and had a further operation to my left ankle in 2015 and another in 2017.

7. In December 2012 I had a motorbike accident and badly broke my left leg.

8. These injuries, particularly the ankle injuries have left me having to use a crutch today.

2. How Affected

1. I can remember being fascinated by my father shaving. I loved the smell of the shaving foam and the old-fashioned shaving brush my father used.

2. One day I was mimicking my father shaving and cut myself. My recollection was that it was only a very slight cut, but I began bleeding profusely. I was approximately 3 years old at the time. It was one of my earliest memories. Contained within my medical records is a letter dated 4th January 1980 from Dr. G.S. Graham, Consultant Pathologist at the Dryburn Hospital to Dr. GRO-D at the Haemophilia Centre at the GRO-D which informs Dr. GRO-D that investigations were carried out and from the results of these tests and the clinical prolonged bleeding, it was thought that I may have von

Willebrands but later I was diagnosed with the condition of Haemophilia. GRO- GRO-B.

3. From that time onwards I had to regularly attend at the GRO-D. My earliest memory of the GRO-D as a child, is that it had a steep ramp which I used to cycle down at speed.

4. I believe that knowing I had haemophilia, made me want to push myself physically even more. I can recall the Consultant in charge of the Haemophilia Centre, Doctor GRO-D, saying to my parents "don't wrap him in cotton wool". I think I took that to the extreme.

5. I always loved outdoor activities and discovered windsurfing.

6. Being so active meant that I inevitably had various bumps and bruises for which I would need specific treatment back at the GRO-D

7. I can recall being treated with Factor 8 and then with Cryoprecipitate. I can particularly remember the taste of the Cryoprecipitate. It was a horrid taste.

8. At some point, I contracted hepatitis C (HCV). I only found out about this by accident when I was about 18 or 19 years of age. I was out in Tynemouth and had had a few drinks. I fell and hit my head against a wall. I believe I went to Rake Lane Hospital in Tyneside. At the hospital I recall someone saying that my records showed that I had previously been infected with HCV. I recall being shocked and stunned at this news. It really worried me.

9. I had heard of HCV and was very worried. I thought it was something that could potentially kill you.

10. I was offered absolutely no support or counselling about it. I was given no information by anyone at the hospital.

11. I took this up at the Haemophilia Centre but my questions about how I came to have HCV seemed to fall on deaf ears.

3.Other infections

1. I am unaware that I had any other infections aside from HCV.

4.Consent

1. I am unaware of any treatment to which I had not consented to.

5.Impact

1. When I was told that I had HCV I was very shocked and worried. I was concerned that I might die.

2. I was specifically concerned that I might have infected other people such as girlfriends that I had relations with. I had no understanding of this infection (HCV) and I was worried and concerned I may have exposed them to it.

3. When I was 20 years of age I was diagnosed with depression and prescribed medication. This worrying concern about HCV was yet another layer of anxiety and a further worry that I now had to deal with. This was a dominating part of my life to the extent that I have had two episodes of self harm, the latter being in 2014 when I attempted suicide. I have abused alcohol to compensate my depression.

4. A few years later, when I believe I was aged around 26 years old, I asked for a HCV test at the Haemophilia Centre. The test came up negative. I think that there must be a possibility that I either self-cleared the HCV or that I was treated

for HCV without my knowledge. I was obviously pleased that I had cleared the infection, but again, I never had any support or help offered to me about all this.

5. When I was younger and still in school, there was an incident where a nurse at the GRO-D leaked my medical records to the school. It was a fee-paying school called Newlands (it is now called Newcastle School for Boys). I was unaware of the details at the time, but I now know that the person who leaked my records wanted me and my brother removed from the school. There was an irrational fear at the time that children like me GRO-B, who had haemophilia, might somehow infect other children with HCV or even HIV (AIDS).

6. I understand that Doctor GRO-D intervened and stopped the Headmaster, GRO-D, removing us from the school. However, it somehow got out. I definitely remember the attitude of other children suddenly changing. It was liked it happened overnight.

7. I began to be shunned by other children and stopped being invited around their houses.

8. I was excluded from physical contact sport activities even though I loved sports.

9. Children were saying that I had "green blood". They were saying that I was like some sort of alien. I tried not to let this upset me. It made me want to fight back. I was getting into a number of fights about this. I also would make a point of standing up for my little brother who was also getting the same sort of abuse.

10. Teachers' attitudes seemed to very dramatically change. I can remember one horrible teacher saying to me that I shouldn't even be there. It was a terrible time.

11. When I was 13 years old, I left the school and went to a state comprehensive school where I never had any such problems.

6.Treatment/Care/Support

1. I continued to keep in contact with the Haemophilia Centre and GRO-D. As stated above. I am disappointed I never had any particular help or assistance or support in respect of my HCV diagnosis. I had to cope with that, the best way I could, all on my own.

7.Financial Assistance

1. When I was still living in Fuerteventura, I was told about the Skipton Fund by my Uncle Mike. He made enquiries on my behalf on how to apply to the Fund and I subsequently made an application in 2004/5. To my disappointment, I was informed by the Fund that I could not pursue my application due to lack of evidence.

2. The reason why my application was turned down was explained to me by one of the head nurses at the Haemophilia Centre at the GRO-D. She informed me that three pages for the relevant period of time, were missing from my medical records.

3. I believe these pages contained information and/or diagnosis of my hepatitis C infection but they were missing from my records. I asked the reason for this, but the nurse could not provide me with an explanation. As I had a close friendship with the nurses at the Centre, it was difficult to push the issue.

4. Living in Fuerteventura at that time meant that there was very little I could do about it, apart from get stressed and so I gave up.

5. I found the Haemophilia Centre at the GRO-D very unhelpful in assisting me with my application to the Fund.

6. In the Summer of 2022, my mother's husband (she divorced from my father) Martin, flagged to me about the Infected Blood Inquiry. This prompted me to find out a bit more about the whole issue and to contact Watkins and Gunn. I felt it important to file a statement and to tell my story.

8.Other Issues

1. I still have concern and upset about the fact that I contracted HCV, but nobody told me about it. I only found out by accident. That means that, for many years, I must have been going back and forth to the Haemophilia Centre at the GRO-D and they knew that I had HCV but nobody ever said anything to me. They never told me and never told my parents. I wasn't even told it had been cleared. There seems to be no transparency, accountability or responsibility. I feel really let down by the system. I also feel let down by Doctor GRO-D. I thought that he was somebody who was looking out for me. I knew him well because he and his son also windsurfed. We seemed to bond over our shared interest, but he never said anything to me about HCV. Doctor GRO-D assistant was GRO-D GRO-D. My brother and I were quite close to her and used to call her GRO-D but I feel she let me down as well.

2. They didn't even tell me about the Infected Blood Inquiry. It was something that was flagged to me by other members of my family. I should have been told more about the Inquiry and what has been happening.

3. I hope this process will bring me some sort of closure and would also hope that the Inquiry will recognise how people like myself have been impacted, so we will receive some recognition and compensation as a result.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C

Date 8th November2022