

Witness Name: Neil Wigmore

Statement No: WITN7551001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: November 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NEIL WIGMORE

I, Neil Wigmore, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My full name is Neil Clifford Wigmore. I was born on 1963, and I live at
2. I was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) through contaminated blood products.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records.

Section 2. How Infected

4. I have mild Haemophilia A. I was treated at the Haemophilia and Thrombosis Centre at St Thomas' Hospital (STH), Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH. I have had very limited infusions of Factor VIII (FVIII) concentrate as I was always relatively careful, and I rarely needed treatment. I may have become infected through FVIII concentrate administered to me for the very first time, when I had an accident (and sustained a hip injury) as a teenager in 1979.
5. Sometime in or around 2002, I was told by the Registrar at a routine check-up appointment that I had tested positive for HCV. I don't remember the date or too much about what followed as I had a bleed on my brain in 2020 which has since affected my memory, but I remember the event.
6. I remember sitting in my consultant's office at the routine appointment, and being told that I was HCV positive. The Registrar read my notes and looked up and casually remarked, 'you have Hep C then?' I remember being stunned and asking, 'can you say that again?' He then said 'yes, you have it' and I said 'No, I don't' and we went backwards and forwards with him finally insisting 'yes, I am telling you that you have tested positive for Hepatitis C'.
7. I recall feeling light-headed, and the walls closing in on me. Not in any way wishing to seem ungrateful to the staff who are always wonderful, but they seemed to act as if it was a non-event, an everyday occurrence. To me I felt as if I had been hit by a bus, that I had a young family and I was now looking into the abyss. I didn't know then exactly what HCV was. I can't put my finger on why it was that I knew that my world had just changed, but I instinctively knew that testing 'positive for Hepatitis C' was not good. I wasn't given very much information to help me to understand and manage the infection there and then as I remember the journey home on the train wondering what was happening. It

was like the wind had been taken out of me. My train journey was a good hour with me sat trying to process what I had been told.

8. I was given more information about HCV (in bits) further down the line to include tests to see how my liver was doing. I recall that my treatment started within a short time of me being told. The nonchalant/matter of fact way that it was dealt with left me with the impression that it was something my clinicians were used to dealing with and that they were dealing with cases like mine all the time. The treatment I had over very many months was successful, and I was told that the virus is now at undetectable levels.

Section 3. Other Infections

9. I do not think that I was infected with anything other than HCV.

Section 4. Consent

10. I was under the overall care of Professor Savage at STH. I wasn't prewarned of the risk of infection before having FVIII treatment in 1979. In or around 1984 or 1985 (at aged 21), I had a brain tumour, and I was given FVIII concentrate again (possibly for the second time as I don't recall if I had any treatment in the intervening years) and I remember Professor Savage telling me then 'we only use heat treated Factor VIII now'. I assumed him to be alluding to HIV although he didn't spell it out. HIV/AIDS was headline news. I liked Professor Savage and I have wonderful memories of him. He was like something out of an Ealing comedy with his loud, booming voice and I was fascinated by him.

11. I wasn't aware that I had been tested for infection. My Uncle had died after becoming infected with HIV. I hadn't had much treatment and I didn't think that I had been placed at risk.

Section 5. Impact

12. Up to the point of being told that I had been infected with HCV, I was feeling relatively OK. To then learn that that I had been infected with HCV and, later, that it had resulted in liver cirrhosis came as a sucker-punch. You hope that there is nothing there by way of damage when they explain that your liver may have been affected and they send you for a scan but when you hear 'yes, there is cirrhosis' it is hard to hear. I learned what it all meant by way of prognosis over a period of time. I wasn't given that information from the outset.

13. The HCV clearing treatment I was given was a rotten treatment. Nurse Jenna at STH dealt with 99% of the treatment side of it. I had regular Interferon Injections over very many months (possibly more than six) at STH initially and then at home. I felt low, to the point of crying. The thought of a horrible thing eating your liver, leaves you with a degree of helplessness. I do not now remember the specifics, but I remember being told that the treatment might not work and that if it didn't work, it would be pointless to try again and there would be nothing more they could do. If it worked, it would be a 'one-shot wonder'. If it worked, they would never know either if that meant that I had cleared it. This was like being on a cliff edge, it felt like an all or nothing moment. Do I jump and hope it works? Or do I wait and see if something more certain is found? They could only ever say that the test indicators were at lower levels than they are able to pick up. I felt that I was in a no-win situation until I got to the end. It was like facing armageddon. I felt very low and very stressed. It all weighs heavily on your mind.

14. I became depressed and I felt lethargic and fatigued throughout the treatment.

The days that I had to self-inject I remember were very dark days. I was a Quantity Surveyor (until I gave up work on health grounds in 2020). In retrospect, I wonder how I was able to carry on (working or at all). I think I did the injections at the weekend, lying on the sofa in the living room. It was a strain on the family, but particularly so on Jill my wife. We had three children and Jill and I had no way of knowing whether my condition was going to be terminal, leaving her bringing the children up alone. In terms of stigma, I didn't share what was happening with anyone, not even my own brother and sister. I was tested for around a year post-treatment, I think. Back then, being infected with HCV was never far from my thoughts. The thought that it might flair up again, is still a worry for me.

15. In terms of my physical health, I take medication for High Blood Pressure and Arrhythmia. The tumour to my Pituitary removed in the 1980s left my optic nerves damaged and reduced sight and means my hormone levels have to be monitored. I had a bleed on the brain in 2020 which has left me with impaired memory, energy and emotion issues. I am now heavily reliant upon the care and support of my wife. As stated, I developed liver cirrhosis as a direct consequence of being infected with HCV. That said, and without a shadow of doubt, it is my mental health that has suffered. I cannot help but think about it and wonder what is around the corner for me going forward.

16. My perception of my experience was that there was a degree of secrecy about the calibre of the blood treatment that had been used on patients and a body of information not made public. I was in blissful ignorance about being infected until 2002.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

17. I was prescribed anti-depressants for depression, but I didn't take them. I was able to manage without them. I wasn't offered any counselling.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

18. I am a Stage 1 Skipton Fund recipient and I now receive financial assistance through EIBSS.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

19. I do not wish to remain anonymous, and I 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.

GRO-C

Signed

Dated

20/Dec/2022