Witness Name: Elyana Cohen
Statement No: WITN7577001
Exhibits: **WITN7577002, WITN7577003, WITN7577004, WITN7577005**
Dated

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ELYANA COHEN

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

I, Elyana Cohen will say as follows: -

Section 1: Introduction

1. My full name is Elyana Hailey Cohen. My date of birth is GRO-C 1970 and I live at an address known to the Inquiry.

2. My father, Stanley Rosenthal (born on GRO-C 1936) was infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) as a result of a blood transfusion in 1997. He passed away in 2018, aged 82. I intend to speak about how my father came to be infected with HCV, the treatment he received, and how his illness affected him and his family.

3. I have compiled this statement with the assistance of my mother, Shirley Rosenthal, who lives in GRO-C, Essex and without the benefit of access to my father's full medical records.

4. I confirm that I have chosen to prepare this statement without legal representation.

Section 2: How Affected

5. Around 1997 my father developed problems passing urine and my mother noticed that he was beginning to look more and more unwell. My father was a bit of a "macho man"; consequently he was reluctant to see a doctor and as he ran his own hairdressing business did not want to take any time off work. Eventually, a friend of my mother's also noticed that he was looking ill and suggested going to see a private doctor that he could visit in the evening after work. My mother made an appointment and my father agreed to go with her.

6. The doctor assessed my father and told him that his problems were likely to be prostate related. He was given a letter and told to phone the hospital in order to make an appointment to have a scan. My father, being the man that he was, never made the appointment.

7. My mother recalls that, on the day of Princess Diana's death, she and my father had made plans to visit my father's elderly parents. On the day, however, he was too unwell to go, and so my mother went alone. It was a Sunday afternoon and it was very hot. When my mother returned, all of the windows and doors were closed and she found my father "white as a sheet".

8. She immediately called their G.P., Wanstead Place Surgery, 45 Wanstead Place, London, E11 2SW, and a doctor came with someone else from the surgery to see my father at home. My mother was told that my father needed to go to the hospital immediately.

9. As my father had private health insurance, the doctor suggested taking him to Spire Roding Hospital (now Spire London East Hospital). He was admitted on 1 September 1997 and his treatment was overseen by Dr V. L. Sharman, a consultant physician from the King George Hospital in Essex.

10. My father was diagnosed with kidney failure, which had been caused by an enlarged prostate. According to a letter sent from Dr Michael J. Weston at Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford to Dr Sharman, in August 2002 he was given a high fluid load and 4 units of blood **WITN7577002** This is confirmed in the letter from Mr Devereux to my father's GP Dr Robinson **WITN75778005**

11. Initially after he was discharged, my father only needed injections to treat his kidneys. However, by August 2001 it was clear that he would need dialysis. It was whilst the doctors at Broomfield Hospital were conducting tests in preparation for the dialysis that it was discovered that he had contracted HCV.

12. We were told that this was as a result of the blood transfusion in 1997. This is corroborated by Dr Weston's letter to Dr Sharman [**WITN7577002** and in a letter sent to Dr Martin J. Raftery at the Royal London Hospital [**WITN7577003**. As Dr Weston states in those letters, my father had no previous history of blood transfusions and did not engage in any behaviour that would have put him at risk of contracting the virus.

13. My father was treated with Interferon and Ribavirin between 2001 and 2004, after which the virus was cleared. My mother and I cannot remember exactly how many courses of treatment this entailed. He still had to have regular scans after his treatment. At some point it was discovered that he had cirrhosis of the liver. We cannot recall when exactly that was. He was constantly exhausted during this period, which was likely as a result of being treated for HCV alongside all of his other health complications. After his HCV diagnosis, it seemed to us he was constantly in and out of hospital.

14. My father received dialysis three times a week from August 2001 for around four years. In 2006, when he was 70 years old, he was able to get a kidney transplant at the Royal London Hospital. We recall there being a meeting at the hospital regarding whether he should be given the kidney because of his age. They decided to go ahead with the transplant because he was so fit, which was something he always took pride in. Although there were complications after the operation and he spent some time in the Intensive Care Unit, the kidney lasted him until his death at the age of 82.

15. Very little information was given to us about what HCV is and what it meant to be infected with it. My mother was told not to share toothbrushes, towels, and even kitchen utensils and food with my father. Beyond this, we did not know much about what the potential effects of the virus were or how it is transmitted. My mother and I do not think that it was ever suggested to us that

we also be tested for HCV.

Section 3: Other infections

16. My mother and I do not believe that my father contracted any other infection as a result of being given infected blood. But we do not know whether some of the illnesses and conditions that he subsequently suffered from are related to his infection with HCV.

Section 4: Consent

17. I do not recall whether my father was tested for HCV without his knowledge or consent. A letter from Dr Michael J. Weston to my father in August 2001, in which he says he will be in touch once he receives the HCV test result, would suggest my father had been told **WITN7577004**.

18. My mother and I do not think that we were informed about potential risks surrounding blood transfusions prior to my father's operation in 1997. Given my father was barely conscious when he was taken to Roding Hospital, we think it is extremely unlikely that he was told himself.

Section 5: Impact

19. We were all incredibly shocked when my father was diagnosed with HCV. Everything seemed to change. His infection with the virus, and his poor health generally, took an immense toll on our family life. I had recently had a baby when my father was diagnosed, and my husband and I were nervous about bringing my daughter to see my parents. I even felt on edge about letting my father hold her. We still did visit, of course; there was no way I would stop my father from seeing his only granddaughter. But the prospect of our daughter contracting HCV was a source of anxiety because of the lack of information we were given.

20. My parents stopped having an intimate relationship around the time of my father's diagnosis and my mother spent most of her time looking after my father. My husband and I remained living close to my parents, which was

largely because I did not want my mother to care for my father alone and I did not like to see her struggle. My mother feels guilty that I did not have any siblings to shoulder some of the burden. I tried to help as much as I could by taking him to hospital appointments and helping out at home. This caused me a lot of stress. At that time I was working part-time, caring for my young daughter, and looking after my parents. It was exhausting.

21. For a while, it felt like every few weeks there was an emergency. On one occasion not too long after my father's diagnosis with HCV, my parents went on to Bournemouth for a few days and my father collapsed on the first day. He went into a coma and we were told he was unlikely to survive. I rushed down to Bournemouth with my husband and daughter because I thought he was going to die. He spent 3 weeks in Bournemouth Hospital before being transferred to Dorset for dialysis and further treatment. After 2 weeks in Dorset he was discharged. My mother and I are unsure what caused this, but we know he had encephalitis which may have been caused by his HCV. Emergency trips like this to the hospital seemed to be a regular occurrence.

22. My parents gave up trying to have weekends away because of experiences like these. They largely stopped making plans at all. My father used to have a thriving social life, but he stopped accepting invitations to things and it was reduced to almost nothing. He did not like people to see him so unwell.

23. He also did not want others to know that he had been diagnosed with HCV. It was only us in the family who knew. This was largely because of the stigma surrounding the virus. At that time (in the early 2000s) little was generally known about HCV and it was effectively viewed as synonymous with HIV. People were scared about catching it just by being around someone who was infected.

24. As I have already mentioned, my father took pride in his fitness. But around the time he was diagnosed with HCV and his kidneys deteriorated he stopped eating much and he lost a lot of weight. According to one of Dr Weston's letters in August 2021, my father then weighed 78 kilograms. But in the lead up to his death my mother and I estimate that his weight had dwindled to

around 9 stone.

25. He was also forced to stop working around the time he had the transfusion. He did not want to; he loved his work. But it became necessary because of his health. Thankfully, we have not struggled financially. My father was able to sell his hairdressing business and he took out an equity release mortgage on what was our family home. However none of this would have been necessary were it not for his health problems.

26. In the years after his kidney failure and HCV diagnosis, my father needed treatment for a range of issues. After his kidney transplant, he needed a hip replacement (which he had in around 2010 at Whipps Cross Hospital) as a result of the steroids and anti-rejection drugs he had to take. He was also diagnosed with Barrett's oesophagus, a pre-cancerous condition affecting the throat, which his death was ultimately ascribed to. His general treatment was overseen by a consultant connected to Royal London Hospital. Although my mother and I are unable to remember his name, he was a lovely man and very competent.

27. We do not believe that my father's infection with HCV caused any complications in getting treatment for his other conditions. Nor do we believe that he had any issues accessing dental treatment, although he saw the same dentist for many years and it is possible that he did not disclose his HCV-positive status.

Section 6: Treatment/Care/Support

28. My father received his treatment for HCV through the NHS. He had no difficulty accessing it; he was told about it as soon as he was diagnosed. My mother and I cannot remember whether he (or we) were told about potential side effects of the treatment, or whether we were warned that it may be ineffective and he may require a further course of treatment.

29. My father became very depressed whilst being treated for HCV. My mother and I cannot say for sure whether this was a result of the drugs he was taking. My mother suggested that he see a doctor and start taking anti-depressants, but he refused. He was very against that sort of thing. We do not know

whether he ever had suicidal thoughts. If he did, it is not something he would have talked about.

30. We were not offered any form of psychological support or counselling. I feel that we should have been. As I have explained, we initially understood very little about HCV or how to cope with it. We were forced to just get on with it.

Section 7: Financial Assistance

31. We were not made aware of the possibility of financial assistance from any of the Trusts and Funds set up to distribute payments whilst my father was alive.

32. I recently contacted the Hepatitis C Trust. I was told that, as my father was infected with HCV by infected blood after September 1991, we are currently ineligible for financial assistance. I am now aware, after speaking to the Trust and the Inquiry's Investigator Team, that this is because this was when the UK introduced routine HCV screening for donated blood. However, as **WITN7577002** and **WITN7577003** show, Dr Weston believed that my father's infection must have come from his transfusion in 1997. I was told by the Hepatitis C Trust that the cut-off point of September 1991 may be changed in the future.

Section 8: Other Issues

33. I have no other matters that I would like to raise.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

34. 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.

Signed GRO-C

Dated 09|01|23