

Witness Name: Nicholas Robert Ibbotson

Statement No: WITN0982001

Exhibits: WITN0982002 - 017

Dated: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS ROBERT IBBOTSON

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 26th September 2019.

I, Nicholas Robert Ibbotson, will say as follows: -

#### Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is Nicholas Robert Ibbotson and my date of birth is GRO-C 1955. I live at an address known to the Inquiry. I am retired and I do voluntary work for local music groups. I am a trustee and Deputy Chair of the British Kodaly Academy, a registered charity working in music education.
2. I have a degree in medicine from the University of Cambridge (1980) and I had a varied career which included the following positions:
  - House Officer, Addenbrookes Hospital Cambridge (1981)
  - Professional Singer, "Cantabile" The London Quartet (1982-1987)
  - Ad hoc Clinical Assistant, St Barts Hospital London (1982-1987)
  - Assistant TV Producer, BBC Science Department (1987-1989)
  - TV Producer, Independent and BBC Scotland (1989-2000)
  - GP (training), Newcastle (2002-2006)
  - GP (principal), Wetherby (2006-2016)
  - Board Member, Leeds North Clinical Commissioning Group (2012-2017)

3. I have never been involved in any way with any investigation or legal proceedings regarding viral infections, blood transfusions or blood products.

## **Section 2: My role at West Midlands Blood Transfusion Service (WMBTS)**

4. My father, Richard Neville Ibbotson, was the Deputy Director of the West Midlands Blood Transfusion Service from 1969 until his retirement in 1989. Through my father, I worked at the service over two summers. My first spell at WMBTS was in the summer of 1974, after my A-levels and prior to returning to sixth form in preparation for the Cambridge entrance exam in December. I am unsure of the exact dates but I would have been released from school in the June. I also went to a Scout Camp in Corsica in early September, so I'm guessing I worked at WMBTS for around 8 weeks over July and August 1974. I had completed A-levels so I was qualified to work as a laboratory technician and I was assigned to the cryoprecipitate laboratory.
5. The second time I worked at WMBTS was over the summer of 1976 after my first year at university. I went on an InterRail holiday around Europe in the September, so I'm guessing I worked roughly from mid-June to the end of August. I might have done some work in the laboratory but I spent most of the time working as a driver delivering blood around the hospitals in the region, which I have to say was much more fun.
6. I have no first hand knowledge or experience of HCV or HIV testing myself. I can remember from conversations with my father that he was very concerned about the difficulties of testing for HCV or "non A non B" as it was known during the late 1970's and into the 1980's. Equally, through the 1970s my father was concerned about Hepatitis B transmission. However, when I worked at WMBTS, these were early days in terms of thinking about transmission of these infections through blood or blood products. My memory is of no instruction in transmission risks other than my conversations with my father. I worked with blood donations in plastic donor sets (plastic bags with tubes used to receive blood donations and keep them sterile), preparing the cryoprecipitate with no gloves, and as I recall, there were no particular infection control precautions such as signs on the door, masks, airflow cabinets or anything similar. At the time, there was no virus testing of routine blood donations as far as I can recall.

### Section 3: My father's (Richard Neville Ibbotson) role at WMBTS

7. My father, Richard Neville Ibbotson, was born on GRO-C 1926. After qualifying in medicine, he worked at Barts Hospital in London before completing his national service as a Royal Air Force Officer. In 1957, he emigrated to Australia where he worked as a Haematologist at a Medical Research Laboratory in Adelaide. After returning to the UK in 1967, he worked at the Department of Health as a civil servant before taking up a position at the WMBTS in autumn 1968 and becoming Deputy Director of the WMBTS in 1969.
8. My father started at WMBTS as a consultant. I think there were three medically qualified doctors at the service at that time, all at consultant grade - the Director, the Deputy Director, and the third consultant. My father started in the third consultant post, and was promoted to Deputy Director at some time in the next year or so. He remained there through the 1970s as he assumed he would get the director's job in due course.
9. Until 1981, the Director of WMBTS was Dr William Bird, who was a respected authority on blood groups and related subjects. Unfortunately when his job finally became vacant in 1981, my father was overlooked and the role went to a doctor from Iran, Dr Feyreydoun Ala. He had done great work establishing the first Clinical Haematology Department and the Iranian National Blood Transfusion Service.
10. My father was upset that Dr Ala was appointed as Director over his head and thought his appointment was politically influenced at a high level. Dr Ala's father, Hossein Ala, had been Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister in the Iranian government under the last Shah of Iran. Dr Ala had moved to the UK after the overthrow of the monarchy during the 1979 Iranian revolution. I think everyone in Birmingham who worked with my father had expected him to get the Director's role and he remained cynical and rather bitter about missing out until his retirement in 1989. My father felt for a large part of his time at WMBTS, he was carrying out the duties of a Director but without the title due to Dr Ala's regular absences.
11. I can't be specific about my father's meetings or his knowledge regarding infected blood or blood products, I can only recall his general views from the conversations

we had at the time, mainly in the 1970s and early 1980s. My father was very experienced and I believe, well known and liked in the relatively small community of blood transfusion professionals. He would often visit the Elstree laboratories and would mention his colleagues at other centres around the UK whom he seemed to know well. My impression was that both of the directors he worked under were more interested in pure research, so my father took more of an interest in the day to day running of the centre and the practical issues in the production of blood products. I know he was very interested in the subject of testing products and the safety of those products, and always kept up to date with the latest science and technology. It is difficult to imagine now in our safety conscious age, quite how basic our knowledge was in the 1970s. It was developing fast, and I believe my father took great interest in the developments but at the same time was frustrated that the administrators, as he saw it, were slow to listen and to catch up.

12. After a few glasses of wine, my dad would loosen up and tell me about the problems he faced at work. I remember from conversations with my father that he was very concerned over many years about importing blood products from the USA, where commercial interests were involved, donors were paid, and Factor VIII was batch produced. He would say that what was happening was outrageous and that the people from whom the blood was being sourced in America were drug addicts and high-risk groups who would donate blood to make money. This was around 1975-1978 when I was still at home regularly. He said these methods of collecting blood attracted people with dubious lifestyles who were allowed to donate as many times as they like. My father said he had discussed these concerns with his colleagues and said the question of UK self-sufficiency was involved in these discussions. He felt that if given the required resources the UK could become self-sufficient. However, he believed there was a lot going on at a higher political level and he felt ignored, if not excluded, from the decision-making.

13. I have seen a letter dated 29th October 1985 from Dr Ala in his role as Director of WMBTS to the Department of Health on the Tainted Blood website. In this letter, he writes: "Even though we are bound to see a number of transfusional AIDS patients in the coming months and year, which have been caused by transfusions given after 1980 or 1981, I think the public and Parliamentary concern is exaggerated and misplaced. Much greater fund and concern should be invested in the more difficult area of influencing attitudes and behaviour rather than allowing them to be dissipated and assuaged in the area of blood transfusion". I exhibit a print of this redacted letter

as W0982015. From the conversations I had with my father, I would be very surprised if he agreed with the contents of this letter. As I have already said, I know that my father did not get on well with Dr Ala, personally or professionally. In my view, this letter demonstrates the extent to which my father was in disagreement with his superior over the risk of infection associated with blood transfusions as well the response required from WMBTS and the Department of Health to tackle the problem. Notwithstanding his disagreement with Dr Ala, ultimately, I think my father would say this problem came down to money, a gap between what was spent and what should have been spent. My father would say it is the fault of the decision makers at the Department of Health. I understand that Dr Ala returned to Iran but I would be interested to hear his perspective on these matters.

14. I know from conversations with my father that he was very concerned, even angry, about the decision-making around HCV testing and the sourcing of blood products. I believe he viewed it as a battle between the profession, ie haematologists and blood transfusion specialists, and the Department of Health in London. Interestingly, he had worked briefly in the Department of Health at Elephant and Castle from January to July 1968, after he returned from Australia, so I think he had an insight to both sides of the battle. Equally, in relation to the HIV testing, though I can't remember specifics, I can recall conversations when returning home at intervals during my medical training from 1975 into the early 80s. My dad said things to the effect that such a test was now available for a specific virus but "the idiots" at the Department of Health were ignoring his advice. I should, however, qualify this by saying it is obviously subjective, and my father was prone to being somewhat hot headed at times. Generally, I don't think WMBTS ever directed my father to respond to infection risks, I think it was more a case of the converse, in that he was always trying to alert them to the risks of infection.

#### Section 4: Other Issues

15. I wanted to contribute to this Inquiry, firstly to speak up on behalf of my father and others like him in the medical profession, who I believe, took this issue very seriously. Secondly, I have quite strong memories of sitting at a laboratory bench with bags of plasma containing a milky precipitate, putting them in a press and squeezing out the plasma. At the time I had no idea of the relevance of what I was doing, but in retrospect I know I was producing a life saving product that was fairly safe. Perhaps

not absolutely safe, but many orders of magnitude safer than the product we went on to use around the country.

16. I believe my father would have wanted me to speak up because if he was here he would have given a long statement to the Inquiry. I think he might even have been a whistleblower had he benefited from the the protections that exist today.
17. I came forward because I was concerned that the medical profession should not shoulder all of the blame for this tragedy. There would have been lots of people in the medical profession, like my father, that were trying hard to stop this happening. In my view, my father would have wanted to point the finger at politicians and decision-makers outside the medical profession. He would say it was because they didn't want to spend enough money on making the infrastructure to achieve domestic self-sufficiency. He felt that more could have been done. He would have wanted to demonstrate how the blood transfusion service as a whole could increase the supply of blood products in the UK.
18. Finally, subsequent to my being interviewed for this statement, I decided to look through some of my late father's possessions that I keep at my house. I found a number of papers that I feel could be of interest to the Inquiry. I have provided scans to the Inquiry and I will retain the originals and make them available to the Inquiry in the future, if necessary. I exhibit the individual documents as follows:  
  
**W0982002** consists of 3 pages and appears to be the draft for a letter dated 12/12/86 from my father R. Ibbotson to Dr A.F. Ala. It is written on National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) headed paper. I recognise the handwritten alterations, as being my Father's handwriting.  
  
**W0982003** consists of one page of what appears to be a draft of some kind, written in what I believe to be my father's handwriting.  
  
**W0982004** consists of 5 pages of what appears to be an untitled draft report with handwritten alterations in what I believe to be my father's handwriting. The document is headed 'W.M.B.T.S. Vincent Drive'.

The following exhibits **W0982005-009**, may be part of the same larger draft document, though it is not absolutely clear. Therefore, I have exhibited as separate documents under their respective titles.

**W0982005** consists of 2 pages headed 'Organisation of Donor Sessions', with alterations in my father's handwriting.

**W0982006** consists of 2 pages headed 'Blood Donor Sessions', with alterations in my father's handwriting.

**W0982007** consists of 2 pages headed 'Nursing Officers', with alterations in my father's handwriting.

**W0982008** consists of a single page headed 'Loss of Donor Sessions', with alterations in my father's handwriting.

**W0982009** consists of 4 pages headed 'Liaison and Communication', with alterations in my father's handwriting.

**W0982010** consists of a single page handwritten letter dated 31/12/86, marked 'confidential' on 'The Queen Elizabeth Hospital' headed paper. The recipient of this letter appears to be my father, it being addressed to 'Dr. Dick' (my Father was known as Dick). The correspondent is not clear, it could be 'Brian'. I do not know who this may be.

**W0982011** consists of a typed single page unsigned letter or draft dated 13/06/73, from my father to Dr. W. d'A Maycock.

**W0982012** consists of a typed, 2 page unsigned letter or draft dated 17/04/73, from my father to Professor Curran.

**W0982013** consists of a single untitled page dated 27/05/81. The letter is unsigned and does not have an addressee, though my father's initials 'RNI' appear at the foot along with the initials 'JAG'.

**W0982014** consists of 2 pages of what appears to be an untitled draft with alterations in my father's handwriting.

I should add, that in relation to the above documents, most of which appear to be in draft, I have no idea if a final version was ever sent or submitted.

**W0982016** consists of a 13 page single sided document titled "Data Capture by the Use of Bar Coding in Blood Transfusion" by Richard N. Ibbotson and Raymond Jackson.

**W0982017** consists of 4 pages from the British Medical Journal on the subject of A.I.D.S. by AP Waterson.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ **GRO-C**

Dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

**Table of exhibits:**

| Date     | Notes/ Description  | Exhibit number |
|----------|---|----------------|
| 12/12/86 | Consists of 3 pages. Appears to be the draft for a letter dated 12/12/86 from my father R. Ibbotson to Dr A.F. Ala. It is written on National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) headed paper. I recognise the handwritten alterations, as being my Father's handwriting. | W0982002       |
|          | Consists of one page of what appears to be a draft of some kind, written in what I believe to be my father's handwriting.   | W0982003       |
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|          | Consists of a single page headed 'Loss of Donor Sessions, with alterations in my father's handwriting.  | W0982008 |
|          | Consists of 4 pages headed 'Liaison and Communication', with alterations in my father's handwriting.  | W0982009 |
| 31/12/86 | Consists of a single page handwritten letter dated 31/12/86 marked 'confidential' on 'The Queen Elizabeth Hospital' headed notepaper. The recipient of this letter appears to be my father, it being addressed to 'Dr. Dick' (my Father was known as Dick). The correspondent is not clear; it could be 'Brian'. I do not know who this may be. | W0982010 |
| 13/06/73 | Consists of a typed single page unsigned letter or draft dated 13/06/73, from my father to Dr. W. d'A Maycock.  | W0982011 |
| 17/04/73 | Consists of a typed, 2 page unsigned letter or draft dated 17/04/73, from my father to Professor Curran.  | W0982012 |
| 27/05/81 | Consists of a single untitled page dated 27/05/81. The letter is unsigned and does not have an addressee, though my father's initials 'RNI' appear at the foot along with the initials 'JAG'.   | W0982013 |

|          |  |          |
|----------|--|----------|
|          | Consists of 2 pages of what appears to be an untitled draft with alterations in my father's handwriting.   | W0982014 |
| 29/10/85 | A one page print out from the Tainted Blood website of what appears to be a redacted letter on WMBTS headed paper from Dr Ala to an unknown addressee at The Department of Health & Social Security. | W0982015 |
|          | A 13 page single sided document titled "Data Capture by the Use of Bar Coding in Blood Transfusion' by Richard N. Ibbotson and Raymond Jackson   | W0982016 |
| 05/03/86 | 4 pages from the British Medical Journal on the subject of A.I.D.S. by AP Waterson   | W0982017 |