

Witness Name: Melanie Richmond

Statement No.: WITN2254001

Exhibits: WITN2254002

Dated: 4<sup>th</sup> January 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

---

### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MELANIE RICHMOND

---

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

I, Melanie Richmond, will say as follows: -

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Melanie Richmond. My date of birth is the GRO-C 1971. My address is known to the Inquiry. I am currently living with my long term partner Martin Walters. I have 3 children, two with an ex-partner and 1 with Martin. I intend to speak about my infection of hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my family and I and our lives together. I do not wish to be anonymous for this statement.

#### Section 2. How Infected

2. I am diagnosed with Von Willebrands disease which I was diagnosed with when I was a young child of about 4 or 5.

3. Typically, when I required treatment I would receive cryoprecipitate when I was a child if I had a severe nose bleed or for dental procedures/operations etc. I also received DDAVP. This was standard practice until 1989 when I received factor VIII once.
4. I was under the care of Dr Audrey Dawson, Consultant Hematologist at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. My present registered GP is at GRO-C  
GRO-C.
5. I received Factor VIII which was the infected product in 1989. I was admitted to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary because I had fallen over and banged my head. I was admitted to hospital for observation. Despite the fact that I would normally receive cryoprecipitate, Dr Audrey Dawson made the decision to give me factor VIII. She was a fairly abrupt person and despite the fact that cryoprecipitate had been successful in the past, she deemed that it would be more appropriate for me to receive Factor VIII.
6. Immediately after Dr Dawson gave me the factor VIII, I remember she said to me "*Let's hope it didn't have any nasties in it*" I asked her what did she mean by this and she advised that I should just come back in 6 weeks to provide a blood test so this can be checked for any indications of any blood diseases. This is what leads me to believe that the factor VIII was the infected product, additionally I had never received factor VIII before and there seemed to be no real reason for this to be given to me instead of the cryoprecipitate I was usually given. I have also been told by numerous doctors that I received the infection from a batch in 1989. I do not know the batch numbers however. Dr Dawson justified me receiving the factor VIII treatment by saying it was a more appropriate treatment for me She did not mention the possibility of hepatitis C. She then abruptly left the room. I did return and had my blood tested 6 weeks later but there were no follow ups and I remember feeling very unconcerned about it. I had heard about the risk of HIV through the media, but I can't even remember going back to be checked, that is how unconcerned I was.

7. I was married at the end of 1991, so I remember that my diagnosis came after I was married in 1992. I had been admitted into Aberdeen Royal Infirmary with a bad asthma attack and unusually when I was admitted I was taken into an isolated cubicle which had contamination labels everywhere. Everyone was wearing masks, gloves and aprons. It was quite disorientating and I had a bad nose bleed. Dr Dawson walked in the room while this was going on and turned to me and said, "*Make sure you put the tissues in the red bin*", she then turned to me and said in a very callous voice, "*We don't want to catch anything from you*". I asked her what she meant by this and she told me I had hepatitis C. I was absolutely shocked and confused it was an extremely upsetting and embarrassing experience.
8. I was given no information at the time, I was just told not to worry about it from Dr Dawson. I was extremely distressed, I didn't understand what hepatitis C was, or what this meant. I was given no practical information about how to manage the infection or to understand it. I should have been warned about the risk long before this day. I should have been given the information before I received the factor VIII. I had never had any problems on cryoprecipitate, I don't understand why she felt it was appropriate or necessary to change the treatment at all. There was never any sort of discussion beforehand, Dr Dawson didn't even tell me she was going to be giving me factor VIII, she just went ahead and did it and told me afterwards when it was already too late. I would have never have agreed to this treatment had she explained the pros and cons to me properly.
9. The first time I realised how serious this was, after I was diagnosed was when I saw a BBC documentary about infected blood. I can't remember the name of the documentary, but that is when it sank in, I was absolutely terrified.
10. Dr Dawson should have told me about the diagnosis long before I was admitted to hospital in 1992. She should have contacted me and explained everything in full and not waited to tell me in the nasty way she did. I am disgusted at how Dr Dawson told me, she told me and then just dismissed me by saying I shouldn't worry about it, that it was no big deal.

11. There was no discussion at the time I was diagnosed, about the risks associated with spreading the infection. There was nothing mentioned even when I went to appointments after this day.

### Section 3. Other Infections

12. I have reviewed my medical records through Thompsons Solicitors. I befriended a haematologist, and he gained my trust enough for me to hand over my own folder, where I held a copy of all my medical records. This folder contained all my hospital notes that were sent to me. When he returned the folder I knew some letters had been removed. What he didn't realise was I had made duplicates. One letter was from Dr Henry Watson to Dr Poulis regarding hepatitis C infection and asking him to inform me of VCJD exposure. I asked my GP to find if it was in my medical records that they held and she was unable to locate this. There are e-mails between Dr Watson and Dr Poulis in my medical records but not this letter. I received a letter advising me that I had been exposed to variant CJD which was also in this factor VIII. Because this was found in the blood, there was a risk I had also been infected with it. There is no test in existence that can confirm if you have been infected with this and the symptoms are very similar to hepatitis C, however it means that surgical procedures have been refused to me. In 2011, I attended St Georges Hospital, London, at the Haematology Department to see Dr Poulis as I had been having a lot of problems with my stomach. I was supposed to be having an endoscopy but Dr Poulis advised me during this appointment that the endoscopy was being refused because of this risk. GRO-D

GRO-D

GRO-D

I was just being told these things by the doctor and refused treatment, refused investigations as and when it suited them to tell me. The impact of this was absolutely huge. Essentially I felt like I was being told 'We don't want to risk other patients so you are not getting any help', was how it left me feeling. I felt second best, not worthy of basic patient care. It was a horrible feeling, I was dismissed, written off, and it didn't matter

that I was suffering. The pain in my stomach got increasingly worse, I begged the hospital to please do the endoscopy as there was something seriously wrong. They still refused for me to see Dr Watson. I contacted Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and flew up there; they had infected me so surely they would have had the basic standards to agree to do the endoscopy. They didn't and the procedure was refused there as well. I wrote to Jeremy Hunt who was our MP for our area at the time and he wrote letters on our behalf to the NHS expressing that this was simply not acceptable and it was my right to have the endoscopy. The next time I attended hospital, there was a terrible atmosphere. The hospital was very angry that I had contacted Jeremy Hunt. They did however agree to give me a camera capsule to swallow and a colonoscopy. Eventually in 2013 I was diagnosed with crohn's disease. I was put on a strong drug called infliximab which is a drug that went into my tummy. The doctors took blood every week while I was on this and during one of these blood tests the nurse came over to me saying *"Did you know you have hepatitis C?"* I panicked because this was 4 years after I had stopped my treatment. They did another blood test and then said *"Sorry we didn't mean to say that, you have antibodies present which shows you have had it, or that its present but not active"*. That took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at Frimley Park Hospital. This happened on the same day my mum and my brother found out that my brother was terminally ill and straight after she was told this, I phoned her saying my hepatitis C had come back. That was an awful day for us. The delay in diagnosing and treating this, meant I had to have part of my small bowel removed and I had to have a stoma bag. This procedure was reversed, four years later, but the fact it occurred at all was beyond disgraceful.

#### **Section 4. Consent**

13. I received the factor VIII without my knowledge or consent. I was only told about it by Dr Dawson afterwards when it was too late. It has shattered my trust in the medical profession as a whole. I know that I received an HIV test as well, but I wasn't told about this either. They knew the factor VIII contained hepatitis C but Dr Dawson still decided to give me it. They withheld the knowledge from me. I was put in isolation when I went to hospital with no

explanation before Dr Dawson decided to tell me as well. I have upon review of my medical records discovered that I was part of a PUP study which I had no prior knowledge of. I am providing a copy of a letter dated the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1992, from the Scottish Blood Transfusion Service to Dr Dawson describing this with reference to a Z8 drug.

14. Even after I was told about the hepatitis C, there was no information provided. Dr Dawson gave me this illness and then was too cowardly to explain what she had given me in full. It was the BBC that told me what the full impact of hepatitis C was. This was before the internet so the information was not as readily available as it is now.
15. It wasn't until 1996 when I gave birth to my 2<sup>nd</sup> son, did I realise that hepatitis C could kill me. I remember Dr [NOT RELEVANT] came to visit me in the maternity ward shortly after I gave birth. I remember he stroked my son's head and to me "*He is a lovely baby; it is a shame that you will never see him go to school*". That was the first time I had heard that hepatitis C could kill me. He didn't give me any information about that, he just left. I feel like all the information, the whole way through, feels like I have always received the full information as an afterthought. Dr [NOT RELEVANT] denied that this conversation took place years later. When I have reviewed my medical records, there are references in my medical records to joint pains, wrists, ankles, knees, depression and flu like symptoms following the factor VIII infusion. These are all dated before I was told about the hepatitis C infection.
16. I have gone for regular blood tests over the years, but I couldn't know what the doctors would do with the blood, if it has ever been used to research purposes. When Thompsons Solicitors sent me my medical records there was a letter on the top of the records from the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service that indicates that I was part of a PUP study. I have never been aware of this. This letter has batch numbers on it in relation to a Z8 drug [NOT RELEVANT] [NOT RELEVANT]. I question if this is proof that I was deliberately infected.

## Section 5. Impact

17. The physical decline in my health happened fairly quickly in the 1990s. I had 2 children when I realised in 1996 that I could possibly be about to die in 4-5 years. I was constantly tired and I fast developed depression. I have chronic fatigue now, and I suffered for a long time from continual mood swings, I just feel ill all the time. There have been times I have felt suicidal. The information wasn't as readily available as it is now, so I remember feeling totally isolated, I couldn't speak to people about the infection. It made me feel isolated. I believe my first marriage broke down because of it. My ex-husband couldn't cope with my mood swings or the depression and the marriage fell apart in January 1996. We are separated and I haven't spoken with him in 20 years.

GRO-D

GRO-D

- I have never attempted suicide, but I did have suicidal ideation. I wasn't actively suicidal, but there was a period of time when I was going through treatment, when I truly didn't care if a bus hit me. This has totally destroyed my trust in all doctors.
18. Crohn's disease and the complications around this have developed because of this whole event. The damage and suffering I was put through wouldn't have occurred to the extent it did if I had been given the basic respect and care I should have had to begin with. I have also developed pancreatitis. I have depression and I get extremely tired because of the chronic fatigue.
19. When I started treatment, there was a presumption that my liver damage was down to heavy alcohol misuse. I have never consumed alcohol, ever. When I argued with the hospital about this, they seemed to take the position that I was lying. They even removed the hand gel from my bedside table because it contained alcohol. I had hepatitis C, genotype 1A, which is the most difficult type of hepatitis to treat, so initially the advice was that treatment for me wouldn't work and there would be no point. They put treatment off as a result for 17 years. Like everything else, I had to argue with the hospital to finally agree to put me on it. I took interferon and ribavirin and this was possibly the darkest period of my life. I was finally declared clear of hepatitis in 2007, but I

feel worse now than I did when I had the hepatitis C. The treatment was awful, my mum and dad had to take care of the boys for a period while I went through the treatment which emotionally has left scars which continue to this day. I should have been on treatment earlier than when I was as well. I remember when I started treatment I was about 12 stone. Halfway through treatment my weight had plummeted to 7 stone 9 pounds. The dosage of the treatment was calculated based on my weight at the start and despite the fact I had this dramatic weight loss, they kept me on the same dosage which made me horribly unwell. It took a pharmacist to spot this before the dosage was adjusted. When I reviewed my medical records, they have left out the fact that they overdosed me. They haven't noted my weight and the dosage of treatment I was receiving. I don't know if they decided not to record this, but it was really frustrating reading this and seeing "*She was bright and happy and treatment is going well*" when nothing could have been further from the truth, I was crawling in there. There was no discussion in my notes or acknowledgement about the emotional impact of treatment. There are notes that say, Melanie did not come into hospital for her final test results and then there is an e-mail in my records that says that I can't bring myself to hear the results in case they are not good. Then the notes say that I finally went in 4 months after the treatment to finally get the results, but the only other thing it mentions about emotional impact is that I did feel mentally unable to cope with the results, even though they were good. I was also supposed to get a follow up appointment, which I never received. I do feel I should have been given the follow up care and that I should receive a regular scan or test to monitor how I am. I did go back to my GP in February 2019 to arrange a fibro scan, to check my liver. I am just waiting for this appointment now.

20. By keeping me on the same dosage for so long, I was being overdosed on the medication. They told me I would suffer depressive moods but it was nothing like I have ever come across in my life and would never want to visit again. What the doctors described would happen, was nothing like what happened to me. It was worse than I can describe. It is horrifying that it took the pharmacist to realise I was being overdosed and this was only 6 weeks before



I was due to finish the course of treatment. I was overdosed on treatment for about 3 full months.

21. The impact in relation to the Crohn's disease has been huge. I was so desperate for a hospital to treat me, I flew all the way up Aberdeen, only to be refused. I discuss this in section 3.
22. In 1997 I went to see a solicitor in Staines, I cannot recall the name of the solicitor. This was to investigate the possibility of a medical negligence claim. He managed to get as far as discovering that the blood had come from American prisons, however weeks after this was established, he phoned me up and told me he had to stop investigating this and he could no longer represent me. He told me he had been threatened and the warning was passed to me as well. I had to stop looking at this as otherwise I would suffer national public humiliation and so would my children. He wouldn't say who it was that had threatened him and indirectly me, possibly someone in Government; I stopped then. I started to realise that this was way bigger than just a case of me being infected and I realised it was looking like a cover-up.
23. There is a reference in my medical records to Professor Arthur, a Hepatologist I saw in Southampton around 1997. He told me and he had it recorded that although I had hepatitis C antibodies, I had cleared the virus. It is written at that point, that I refused interferon treatment. I did refuse, why would I go through that if I had cleared the virus myself?! However, he was wrong and I was unaware as a result, that I still had hepatitis C for a long time after! There are further records in my medical records with doctors questioning why he had come to this conclusion as well.
24. I can remember one visit to Professor Arthur and telling him that I struggled daily with fatigue. I remember him barking at me, quite abruptly saying it had nothing to do with hepatitis C and it was in my head. This led to me not being honest about how I really felt with all medical professionals.

25. When my children started school, the school were aware that I had hepatitis C. I remember attending a school function in the early 2000's and there were rows of china tea cups and saucers for the parents to have tea from. I was then given a polystyrene cup, and I asked them, why this was. The answer was "*Well, you know, we don't want to make an issue of it, we just need to avoid you infecting anyone*". I put the cup down and just left. I was totally devastated by that, it really floored me. It left me feeling like I was dirty. My brother used to flat share and I remember going over for dinner. After dinner, I heard my brother and his flatmate having an argument because his flatmate had binned all the cutlery that I had used during dinner. This was done on the basis that the flatmate believed they were protecting themselves from being infected. I just drove home, I couldn't cope with it at all. I remember an ex-boyfriend shouting out publicly that I had hepatitis c and everyone should watch out because they could catch it from me. When I was given treatment, I would be taken straight into theatre and not the prep room. The operating table would have a big red hazard sign on it and everyone would be wearing masks and gloves while I was being prepared for surgery. I was getting very depressed and I remember doing my own treatments at home, when I was at my lowest. I remember sitting in the bathroom and letting the drip just flow out with the blood until I passed out. I remember coming round in a pool of blood with the boys knocking on the door looking for me. That was when I was going through the treatment. I was very imbalanced at this time. I was very aggressive during the treatment, I would lose it over the tiniest thing and I felt extremely violent. I couldn't cope with any changes, any adjustments to anything in my life. It was only knowing that I had to be there for my children that kept me going. I had to really fight to have my children's own personal health notes to be altered as they originally had 'at risk' exposure to VCJD on them. I did not feel that they deserved this label.

26. Originally my biggest dream was that I wanted to become a paramedic. I wanted to study this but I had to change and study counselling. This was because I had hepatitis C, I was not allowed to become a paramedic. This has been the biggest loss for me for all of this. My dream was to be a 1<sup>st</sup> responder and it was shattered by the actions of the medical profession. I thought going

to college was the right thing to do but I was just too sick. I tried to join the army when I was 17 years old, but I was also turned down because of the Von Willebrands Disease. I was never able to complete the course I was just too ill. Now I can be in a supermarket or something and suddenly get so tired I have to just lie on the floor. Suddenly I can find that I become so ill, I just have to pull into the side of the road, and sleep for 20-30 minutes and ask Martin to come and get me.

27. I don't really speak about it to people. I tell close friends but try and avoid conversations about it as it is too depressing.

28. Something I feel very uncomfortable discussing, is a termination I had in 1996. My middle son was only 3 months old at the time, so the consultant, deemed it was safer to terminate the pregnancy. I was admitted to hospital the day before the operation and I remember that my bed was prepared for theatre. By prepared, I mean it had large red and white "hazard" stickers and large yellow bio hazard stickers, which were stuck down the side of the bed and on my notes. Whilst I was moving down the corridor the nurse and porter were discussing where I was going. The porter told the nurse that I was to go straight into theatre instead of the anaesthetic room. When I arrived in the theatre, the surgeon and anaesthetist were all gowned up, waiting for me. The surgeon explained that to minimise the risk of hepatitis C contamination they felt it best to avoid using the normal procedures. As he was talking, my gown was lifted up to my waist and my legs placed in stirrups. I was aware the porter was still present and I started to sob uncontrollably. I felt totally degraded and humiliated. The surgeon asked if I wanted to proceed, I said yes as they had already terminated the pregnancy by medicine the previous day. The surgeon said I needed to calm down and I did try my best to do so. They then put me to sleep. I deserved the respect and care afforded to any other patient, particularly because of the circumstances that day. In my medical notes it says I went straight to theatre and the reasons why. My notes also state that I was distressed and was given oxygen during and after the operation due to the impact on my breathing.

29. I am unable to work a normal job. I have dearly tried. I used to be on ESA but due to difficulties with ESA I now no longer even receive this. I have tried over the years; I remember attempting to work for National Express and getting fired because I couldn't manage this and it was only sitting on a tour bus as a host. I was too slow when I did attempt to work, the chronic fatigue just made me crash all the time. I have for a long time being a foster carer which has worked out well as it allows me to rest when I need, however I have now made the decision to stop doing this as well as even this has become too much for me and I do not know if I will return to fostering in the future, it depends on my health.

30. I was on ESA for a long time. I remember I was due to go for a medical assessment for ESA at one point and I was feeling unwell with a stomach bug. The night before the assessment my dad [GRO-C] he lives in [GRO-C], so I said to the assessor during this assessment, that I wasn't feeling well and that Dad [GRO-C] so I was going to see him. On that basis the assessor wrote down that I was going on a holiday to see my dad and stopped the ESA, even though I could prove that Dad [GRO-C] [GRO-C] That went to a tribunal with the help of the Citizens Advice Bureau, the judge said he couldn't believe I was there and he was disgusted that I had been put through it. He said to me that I would never have to attend another assessment again and granted my payments. They later on stopped my payments again and I don't know why. I can't face going to the benefits appointments anymore, I can't fight the DWP anymore on this.

31. Mum was my biggest support through all of this. My children were too young to understand and I just wasn't well enough to look after them during my treatment. I know my parents were both completely devastated. My dad and I had a lot of disagreements during my treatment. Dad would come and pick me up to come and see the boys when I was going through treatment, [GRO-D]  
[GRO-D]  
[GRO-D] I already had emotionally suicidal feelings going through treatment, and then that happened about 3 or 4 times. It was just such a black period. I can't even fully describe how black this period was. [GRO-D]

GRO-D

the boys were living at their home, at the time. It was a stressful situation. GRO-D

GRO-D

GRO-D I didn't have the strength to fight back then. I just felt so low within myself, GRO-D

no strength to cope. GRO-D My eldest son, Jordan, can't talk about hepatitis C. He can't even bear the topic being mentioned. GRO-C

GRO-C He doesn't want to hear about the Inquiry or anything on TV. He says that hepatitis C has destroyed his life. He would find me in pools of blood, he had to help care for my youngest son, he had to go through the stigma at school as everyone knew I had hepatitis C. In those days, the other children assumed I was a prostitute or a drug user. He put up with a lot. He was bullied but he would never talk to me about it. He wouldn't say, because if he had, I would have gone up to the school and created such a fuss. I was in such a rage because of the treatment. My other son Christopher, the impact on him has been significant. He has attempted suicide

GRO-C

GRO-C I struggle to talk with him about everything, it just leaves me in floods of tears.

32. Throughout my treatment my mum was really the main carer for all three of my children. My eldest son had to take care of my youngest son, he missed out on his entire childhood because of it. My middle son, Chris, struggled with bullying at school and as a consequence, attempted to jump in front of a lorry. He was taken out of school and he never went back. As a result, he has left school with no qualifications. GRO-C

GRO-C Mum and Dad divorced, not solely because of this, but the pressure of having the three boys and the worries involving myself contributed. Martin, my current partner has stuck by me for a long time now, but he has to put up with a lot. GRO-C

GRO-C He has to put up with the travel to the appointments and my depression as well. If I am not well enough to do something, the pressure falls on Martin to carry the workload.

## **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

33. I have been refused an endoscopy for years, the ulcers in my bowel would not have occurred if I had had the proper care. I am treated with disdain by some medical professionals, with the presumption that I have an alcohol or drug problem. I have never been offered psychological support, despite the hell of treatment and the depression that I have been left with. At one point I was befriended by a haematologist, Professor Graham Smith, and he gained my trust enough for me to hand him my personal health records. This was a folder with all hospital notes sent to me. When he returned the folder I knew some letters had been removed. What he didn't realise was I had made duplicates. One letter was from Dr Henry Watson to a Dr Poulis regarding hepatitis C infection and asking him to inform me of VCJD exposure. I asked my GP to see if it was in my medical records and she was unable to find it. Looking through all these medical notes, although there are emails between Dr Watson and Dr Poulis, but this particular letter, is not there. These e-mails contained references to joint pain, wrists, ankles, knees etc, depression and flu like symptoms following the factor VIII infusion and this was prior to me being told I had hepatitis C.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

34. I found out about the funds through the internet and conversations with other people.
35. I have received £20,000 and £30,000 from the Skipton fund. The first payment was in 2010. I now also receive £19,000 per year. The first payment started up with this in December 2018 from the SIBSS.

CF/ V1850312

36. The process for applying was fairly straight forward, it was really a case of filling out a form and signing boxes. I had no obstacle in receiving financial assistance as I had enough proof with all the doctors letters I had.
37. This feels like it is too little, too late. The financial support isn't good enough, the Government have never taken into consideration the overall impact it has had on everyone

### Section 8. Other Issues

38. Thompsons Solicitors are recovering my medical records for which I will be given the opportunity to review.
39. I am angry and hurt, as are thousands of others. I am willing to stand and give evidence against the doctors that wronged us, in fact, I am desperate to! I have been silenced for far too long, afraid it would jeopardise my treatment in the future. I have managed to do this anyway so I have nothing to lose now. Reading through my medical notes has fired me up even more as they write so kindly about me following appointments, when I know these appointments did not go well at all. They overdosed me on interferon but yet there is no mention of that, only that they were concerned about my weight and would keep an eye on it. They couldn't care less; I was told to eat cheese with mayonnaise as a solution!

### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed GRO-C

Dated 28/03/19