

Witness Name: Nicola Jayne Hunter  
Statement No: WITN2758001  
Exhibits: WITN2758002- WITN2758003  
Dated: April 2019

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NICOLA HUNTER

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I, Nicola Jayne Hunter, will say as follows:-

#### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Nicola Jayne Hunter. I was born on the GRO-C 1969 and I live at GRO-C Herts, GRO-C. I am a wife and a mother to three children, two of whom are still dependent. I work part time as an assistant practitioner for the NHS, and this involves working with the district nurses.
2. My dad was called Eugene Noel O'Riordan but he was known as Noel. He was born on the GRO-C 1944 in Ireland and moved to England where he met and married my mum. They had two children; me and my brother Michael. They divorced in around 1976 but remained close friends. My dad never remarried. I lived with mum but saw my dad regularly as he lived down the road.
3. Dad used to work for Heinz in the warehouse until he was about 54 years old when his health meant he could not work anymore. He moved back to Ireland and died on the 22 June 2009, aged 65.

4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to all my dad's medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

## **Section 2. How infected**

5. In around May 1980 aged 36 my dad began to suffer from chest pains. He had a triple heart bypass on 20 October 1998 at Hammersmith Hospital. I believe it was during this operation that my dad received contaminated blood and attach documents confirming 8 bottles of blood were ordered, he received 1.6 litres of blood during the operation and he had a reaction to this blood in Exhibit WITN2758002.
6. His chest was cracked right open. He was in hospital for five days, and then he recuperated at home. At this time he was very poorly. I was quite shocked because he said he could feel his chest bone moving around.
7. He had a second heart bypass in around 1995 at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, but I believe it was established that he was given the infected blood during the first heart bypass and refer to the letter dated 27 May 1990 from Cork University Hospital to Central Middlesex Hospital requesting my dad's medical records for the Skipton Fund payment at Exhibit WITN2758003.
8. Dad was not given any advice about the blood transfusion. My mum went with him and she was not aware of any advice either.
9. My dad was not told that he had Hepatitis C until 2009, which was about six months before he passed away. He had been ill for a long time but he did not know why but I think he assumed it was down to his heart problems. NOT RELEVANT
- NOT RELEVANT told dad he had liver cancer and then called him back and said they got it wrong. They then did more tests at the Mercy University Hospital Dublin which confirmed he did have liver cancer. The family felt let down after being given incorrect results. It demonstrated how incompetent

they were. He was diagnosed with liver cancer and the Skipton Fund got involved.

10. Adequate information to help my dad understand and manage his infection was not provided.

11. No other information was provided about others being infected.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

12. I do not think Dad had anything else besides Hepatitis C.

### **Section 4. Consent**

13. I do not know if he was tested without his knowledge and consent.

### **Section 5. Impact of the Infection**

14. My dad suffered very badly during the last eighteen months of his life. He spent a lot of time travelling to the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital in Dublin which had a specialist unit and was then transferred to Mercy University Hospital Dublin, to see a specialist. The journey was about three to four hours.

15. Dad was in bed a lot of the time and he was always in pain and discomfort. He would always feel cold, even in summer. I believe the Hepatitis C had laid dormant for years and years so I do not know if he felt ill because of the Hepatitis C or other health problems.

16. His mental health really suffered in the end and he was always very down. When he was told he had Hepatitis C he became withdrawn and went into his shell. My father was beside himself with grief and worry about present and past relationships. People would ask you what was wrong with him and you never knew what to say.

17. The Hepatitis C had developed into liver cancer and this was ultimately what killed my dad.
18. A nurse told my brother that Dad only had six months left to live. They told my brother that it was his choice whether to tell Dad or not. My brother decided not to tell him as he wanted him to not give up on life.
19. Dad received some treatment which my brother thought was chemotherapy drugs. The medication was new to market but it brought Dad out in burns and blisters on his skin and in his mouth. A home help would come and see to the burns daily. Dad also went to the Oncology Unit at University Hospital Kerry weekly to treat the burns. He was either in bed or at the hospital as he was very tired and had no energy. He had no appetite and was often sick.
20. I do not think he faced any difficulties accessing treatment but Dad was never offered a liver transplant. I do not know what treatment was available to know if they should have given him something else.
21. I would imagine Dad got all the dental and health care he required.
22. In terms of his social life, Dad became withdrawn. He went back to Ireland 10 years before he died, aged 54, because he was not well enough to work so he wanted to be with his family. He moved back to his family town but he lived in a rural area. It was about a five mile journey into town so when he was ill he could not make that journey; therefore he became isolated.
23. It had a massive impact on all of us when dad was ill and I would travel over to Ireland for the weekend to see him every fortnight.
24. My brother, Michael O'Riordan, had to give up his job in England and move to Ireland to look after my dad in 2008. Dad became more and more house bound; he needed help washing, getting dressed and making meals. My

brother: GRO-C as it was rural and he did not want to leave my dad for any length of time.

25. I had children at that stage who were close to my dad. It was difficult trying to explain to the children that their grandad was dying. It was a worrying time for everyone. I took the children over to see him as often as I could. We did not stay with my dad in the end because he was so unwell and he did not want to see anyone because his health was so bad. The children were young and I did not want to expose them to any risk which was unnecessary, but I feel really bad about this.

26. My children were still in school when my dad passed away. It was a hard time for all of us. It was the first time they experienced losing a family member. Dad was so young as well, he was looking forward to get his Irish pension at 66, but he never saw it.

27. Not a lot of people knew what Hepatitis C was so there was a stigma. People stopped coming to see dad, as I think they were concerned about whether it was something they could catch. People would ask why he was ill and we were never quite sure what to say.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/care/support**

28. No counselling was ever brought up or mentioned to my dad.

29. Dad just had a carer who came in once a day for an hour.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

30. The nurses at the Mercy University Hospital Dublin told my dad about the Skipton Fund.

31. Dad started the application in the last six months of his life then the Skipton Fund got in touch with us after he passed away. He did not receive any money when he was alive.

32. My brother and I received a first payment of £20,000 in around October 2009 and then a second payment of £25,000 in around December 2009. There was a further cheque of £25,000 later on as well in around June 2013.

33. The Skipton Fund was very helpful. There was never an issue and they always kept us updated.

### **Section 8. Other Issues**

34. I am shocked that it has taken so long for this to come to light. I am outraged that it has taken this amount of time to be taken seriously. I feel it has been deliberately kept quiet. At the time it was bad enough and now it is time for it to be addressed.

### **Anonymity, disclosure and redaction**

35. I do not wish to seek anonymity.

36. I will think about if I want to give oral evidence but I think there will be someone in a better position to put their story across.

### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed... GRO-C .....

Dated... 04.04.19 .....



## Medical Chronology

(This summary is not intended to be exhaustive but sets out key points in the records relevant to the statement)

- May 1980 began feeling chest pains
- 16/10/1980 request for pathological examination and request for transfusion
- 17/10/1980 acknowledgment of request for blood grouping and transfusion
- 19/10/1980 test for blood transfusion
- 20/10/1980 operation notes – Coronary artery bypass grafts x 3 – a total of 1.6 litres was given in all
- 20/10/1980 clinical notes - reacted to blood in ICU (urticaria). Blood – discontinued
- 30/10/1980 letter to GP from M J Vaughan FRCS. Postoperatively – he had a reaction to the blood which was successfully treated with hydrocortisone. 3 days later he had an episode of chest pain but there was no obvious evidence for myocardial infarction. Otherwise he made a good recovery