

Witness Name: Susan Elizabeth Knowles

Statement No; WITN3339001

Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SUSAN ELIZABETH KNOWLES**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 22 October 2019.

I, Susan Knowles, will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

1. I was born on GRO-C 1956 and live with my husband at an address known to the Inquiry. I first worked in the civil service as an official for the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), and then in the teaching profession, before leaving work in 2011. I am currently a carer for my husband. For my studies, I obtained a history degree and trained to teach history at Durham University, but there was a problem with graduates finding jobs at the time so I went into the civil service in 1979.
2. I confirm that I am not legally represented and that I am not seeking anonymity.

3. I have signed a consent form for the use of my statement dated 10 December 2019 and I am happy for this to be used in conjunction with this statement once it is signed.

## **Section 2: My work for the DHSS**

4. My first role for the DHSS was as an Executive Officer in Reading which I started in August 1979. However, I didn't enjoy the coding I had to do, it was on a project computerising Social Security benefits, so I sought a new role. Then from 28 April 1982 to 9 July 1984 I worked for the DHSS from the Euston Tower as a Regional Liaison for the Oxford Regional Health Authority.
5. My role there was primarily to acquire information from the Regional Health Authority and its District Health Authorities (or pass DHSS information to them), and to deal with correspondence from MP's or the public about the services provided. Regional Liaisons were effectively the eyes and ears of the ministers, there to gather information from health authorities in the regions and pass it on, particularly if it was information that looked likely to be picked up by the press. Mine was therefore a politically sensitive role as the information I gathered could be used to inform policy options at a higher level.
6. My role encompassed liaison with professionals within the DHSS including Social Services, and medical advisory roles. I also provided briefings for Early Day Motions and questions in Parliament and briefings for Ministers if they were visiting my Region. I collated information for Regional Reviews which Ministers held yearly within the Region and I also attended certain Health Authority meetings to take notes, and for fact finding purposes, when accompanying the Principal
7. As Regional Liaisons needed to be kept informed of topics/issues which might impact on Health Authorities, we received memos and copies of correspondence. These might be signed and passed on, copies taken and filed if appropriate in cabinets behind our desks.

8. Once full, a new file would be opened, and the full file went to cages along the corridor. I believe after a time these were then sent to the section in West London where they would be reviewed or weeded for retention or destruction. I contacted the Section in West London on at least one occasion to gain historical info or to ask about file retention. Some files grew slowly and one file remained in the cabinet all the time I was there (the one on the Blood Transfusion Service, for example). I can't be more specific now as to the location of this Section.
9. In April 1983 my department moved from the 15<sup>th</sup> Floor of Euston Tower to the 14<sup>th</sup>.
10. The structure [of Regional Liaison] was sharply hierarchical: there was an Under Secretary, Principals (with two Health Authorities per Principal); Higher Executive Officers (one for each Region); and Executive Officers (one for each region), with a Clerical Assistant for one or two regions to do the filing, go to the typing pool etc. There was also one Senior Executive Officer who worked on analytical type projects I think who was called Peter Smith.
11. In November 1982 my Higher Executive Officer, Mary Sweeney, was replaced by Malcolm Clancy. In July 1983 my Principal Lynne Fosh was replaced by Graham Horsnell. Mary was very experienced in the work and did a lot, but when she left, Malcolm came from a different Section and deferred much more to my letter drafting and, by now experience within my section. I was suddenly much busier and had a more varied workload.
12. In March 1983 Lynne was approached to minute meetings of the Academic Forum - a forum held roughly every quarter at Moorfields Hospital for the Chief Medical Officer and the Department Medical Officer(s) to meet with Doctors and Professors from the Teaching Hospitals to hear their opinions. One such meeting was attended for about an hour by Kenneth Clarke. Lynn persuaded Dr Rivett, who was one of the more senior Medical Officers, that I could capably take the Minutes of these meetings, and so I began to do so and the minutes were then sent up to Dr Rivett.

13. I have retained the declaration I had to sign on leaving the DHSS on 07 July 1984 - it reminds me that I have signed it, and the conditions attached to it, for life. I did not take a copy of the memo I wish to discuss, or leave with any other paperwork. Although I felt that the Memo could have future significance, I did not break the Official Secrets Act at any point.

## **Section 2: The Memo**

14. The Memo I saw was such a document that it caused me concern when I read it. It raised concerns about blood products and the risk of contamination to Haemophiliacs but also, I think to other recipients of blood transfusions. It talked about testing/treating the blood for a sum of £475,000 and mentioned that the government had refused to fund the testing when the problem was identified.

15. The memo seemed to be part of a cost-cutting culture that was present at the time. The memo was just information that came through though, the matter itself wasn't initiated by Regional Liaison. Either I felt he had commented or initialled it, as I have always associated the rejection of taking action with Kenneth Clarke.

16. I think there was a reference to the Haemophilia Society in the memo which suggested they were not pushing for testing - I recall that I thought it was strange that the Haemophilia Society was not pushing for testing or treating the blood products. Recently, after further research it would appear that the Haemophilia Society was not making a fuss as it didn't want to lose a form of treatment.

17. There was talk of either testing/treating the blood products – I can't be sure exactly which, [in the memo] which was part of a longer ranging discussion on the danger of contaminated blood.

18. The fact that an amount of money was mentioned makes me think it was an internal memo. Potentially it could have been like a minute, several paragraphs

long, possibly with the signatures of people who had seen it, on government letterhead. I can't recall if the memo was addressed to Kenneth Clarke or someone of his rank but I believe Kenneth Clarke may have annotated it. Kenneth Clarke's handwriting was very small and went down between the lines, I had seen it on a number of other documents. My history teacher had once said Philip II was really concerned with minutiae. I remember thinking of Philip II doing all this annotation and looking at Kenneth Clarke's little hand writing scrawling down the page. It would snail round the side of the page and between the margins. In any event I definitely linked the memo with Kenneth Clarke.

19. I can't be sure if the memo was before the Academic Forum, attended by Kenneth Clarke in the summer of 1983 as I don't recall feeling any antipathy towards him at the Forum so I probably hadn't seen it yet. I think the memo was from May onwards possibly even early 1984. It definitely wasn't just before I left which was in July 1984.

20. I'm certain I filed the memo under Blood Transfusion Service (Oxford Region) but I may have put a copy in another file also.

21. I was given work by the Higher Executive Officer for my region, or sometimes by the Principal directly and I could go and speak to either easily. My drafts went to the Higher Executive Officer for checking/ comment and then were sent to typing before being sent back to me for checking, and then filed or distributed (probably by the Clerical Assistant). We often received internal memos and contacted other sections of the DHSS. Some of the letters and memos we drafted as briefings and the like for Ministers would come back to us with annotations, and would be re-typed before going back to the Private Office. The memo was almost certainly from either another DHSS section or possibly the Private Office.

22. During my time as the Regional Liaison, AIDs developed as a major public health concern, but there was also the implementation of the Mental Health Act 1983, Care in the Community, and deep discussion around the cost of

pharmaceuticals, all of which would result in memos and inquiries if a question had been asked by an MP in my Region.

23. As this memo was for info only I do not recall discussing it with anyone. It was not an area we would usually comment on, the Minister having already decided on the matter, and the lead would have been one of the medical advisory parts of the DHSS. I think other Executive Officers might have received a copy of the one I saw, unless it had come to me from the academic forum paperwork as I was the only person involved with that. The Academic Forum was very much Dr Rivett's baby, so a copy of the memo would definitely have been seen by him if it was from there. However, I don't think it came to me through the Academic Forum work.

24. The memo may have come down through Malcolm or Graham to be filed or it might have come to me from another source directly.

### **3. Other issues**

25. I have always felt concerned about the memo and worried about the deaths that might result. I think it stuck in my mind because I found the contents unconscionable. I sat near a gay colleague and it had made me think about what I knew of the lifestyle. I had already made the connection in my head that HIV could be easy to transmit. I recall thinking at the time that it was disgraceful the £475k hadn't been spent on testing the blood products. Subsequently, I learnt that £2m went on advertising the sale of British Gas paid for by the Government. The "Sid" campaign. It just made you think!

26. It was while all this cost cutting was going on that I began to wonder about being a civil servant.

27. A few years later I saw people getting pay-outs on the news relating to the Infected Blood. At first, I thought Kenneth Clarke and the Government had been called to account but then I realised this wasn't the case. I then read about the

Archer Inquiry but it only seemed to ask victims or health professionals to come forward, there was no suggestion that they were interested in anyone in a government department which I thought was unfortunate at the time. I also didn't have any documents to hand over. When I read the Terms of Reference of the Infected Blood Inquiry I thought that this applied to my situation and I was ready to speak so I made contact.

28. I also saw the Private Eye article in September 2017 which triggered my memory. It described trouble at the Haemophilia Society which faced a conflict of interest with the DHSS over the way it represented victims of the scandal. Concerns about the charity's funding from the Dept of Health (Article called Tainted Blood – Sorry Story) and that re-enforced my memory about the memo and that I had been puzzled that the Haemophilia Society hadn't been more vocal about what was going on at the time.

29. I had also read that Kenneth Clarke in "Bad Blood", The Guardian article from 3 March 2018 by Simon Hattenstone, had said he wasn't involved with blood products which I do not think was quite true.

30. He said "The allegations made by the victims of the blood products tragedy are completely inaccurate.... I was a junior minister, as minister for health, and blood products were not one of my responsibilities. In my opinion, victims have made attempts in recent years to bring me into their campaigns because I am the only person left who was at the Department of Health at the time and who is a minor celebrity still, so they could obtain more publicity for their complaints if they had associated them with me...I have no close connection with the subject."

31. He contradicts The Guardian article in a statement he gave to parliament on 14 November 1983, available through Hansard where he discusses the redevelopment of the blood products laboratory at a cost of £21m, and plasma imported into the UK.

32. I have wracked my brains to try and recall just what may have happened with this memo and I have provided as much information as I can recall. I hope that it may be of assistance as I feel the government has reneged on its responsibilities in relation to infected blood and those who have suffered as a result through no fault of their own. However, I am as I've mentioned worried about the consequences in respect of a possible breach of the Official Secrets Act and would like some clarification on that point.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C: Susan Knowles

Dated

17<sup>th</sup> March 2020