Witness Name: Darren Peter Bass
Statement No: WITN7620
Exhibits: **Nil**
Date:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DARREN PETER BASS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 January 2023.

I, Darren Bass, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Darren Peter Bass. My date of birth is GRO-C 1980. I live in GRO-C; Newcastle, and my full address is known to the Inquiry. I was born in Gateshead at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I live with my partner Annelien and we have a daughter; GRO-C who is 4 years old.

2. I have always worked in manual labour and worked in demolition, building and on the fairgrounds rides. However, I am currently unemployed because I had a spinal fusion operation last year from which I am still recovering. I have had one neck fusion operation and

four disc compression operations in total and I am waiting for a hernia operation in the next couple of months.

3. I wish to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV). In particular, the nature of my illness, how it affected me, and the impact it had on me and my family and our lives together.

4. I confirm that I am not legally represented and I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist me with my statement. I understand that I have the option to seek anonymity however, I do not wish to provide my account anonymously and I am happy for my name to appear.

5. The Inquiry Investigator has explained the Inquiry's statement of approach and 'Right to Reply' procedure. I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

6. I wish to acknowledge that as time passes, memories can fade. I have been able to provide approximate timeframes for matters based on life events. However, these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates.

7. My partner Annelien Bass was present at my witness statement meeting and has supported me in giving my statement.

Section 2. How Infected

8. I was born prematurely and initially failed to thrive. I was jaundiced and failing to put on weight. At birth I didn't weigh much more than a bag of sugar. There is a good chance that I have had HCV since birth because I was jaundiced throughout my childhood. I was referred to the Freeman Hospital as no one could put a finger on what was causing this jaundice. The doctors put it down to Gilbert's syndrome

which I had been diagnosed with. In fact they put all my symptoms down to Gilbert's syndrome as they didn't know that I had HCV.

9. I think it is more likely that my HCV infection was passed to me at birth from my mum because I am aware that my mother underwent a number of blood transfusions at the time of my birth which were unsuccessful. She had some sort of kidney disease and had a kidney removed and in the process underwent a number of blood transfusions. She had problems with her haemoglobin so she had a lot of transfusions to get her blood levels up. She was always fatigued but put it down to kidney issues and spent the last 10 -15 years of her life on dialysis. She died when I was 19 years old in 1999 of a brain haemorrhage.

10. I think my mum may have contracted HCV from the transfusions and passed it on to me. After my birth she had her second kidney taken out and stayed on dialysis until she died. She was constantly given blood during her dialysis.

11. All her treatment took place at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle. I have no idea under whose care she was while in hospital. My mum was a very private person and didn't talk about it. My dad died before my mum and I have not spoken to my brother since my dad died. Therefore, I am not able to ask anyone any questions about my mum's medical history. I intend to apply for my mother's medical records to see whether there is any record of the transfusions she received at my birth.

12. As a child I suffered from stomach problems and pains on my right side when growing up. What should have been the whites of my eyes, were yellow and you could hardly see any white. I had a yellow tint to my skin on my shoulders and the tops of my arms and stomach. It wasn't just the whites of my eyes that were yellow, but my whole skin. Irregular Bilirubin levels are an indication of liver problems and my

Bilirubin level always presented on the high side whenever my blood was tested.

13. As a child I couldn't run around and I had no energy to play with my friends so I would come in a lot earlier than everyone else as I was just exhausted. I was always going to the doctors because I was run down. Between the ages of 6 and 10 I would eat my family out of house and home, even though I was still in junior school.
14. I also underwent various medical procedures during my childhood and I was 6 or 7 years old when I had my first major surgery. I had my tonsils and adenoids removed and I also had surgery for fluid on my ear. All these surgeries took place around the same time in 1986 or 87, and they all took place at Sunderland Hospital.

15. In the intervening years I suffered symptoms of fatigue and I was jaundiced. During 1995-1996 I was always jaundiced. In my early years I suffered nausea, reduced appetite, pale stools and dark urine and I had pain in my right upper quadrant for 3 weeks. I put my symptoms down to Gilbert's syndrome.

16. I also had a bone tumour on my big toe removed a couple of times, as it grew back. However, I have no idea if had a blood transfusion for the childhood operations. I had my appendix out when I was 15 at Wanbeck General Hospital, Ashington, Northumberland. I went in for surgery and went home the next day with staples in my stomach.

17. I had surgery following a car crash in June 1995/1996 and was taken to Rake Lane Hospital for surgery whereupon I needed a blood transfusion. I remained in hospital for a couple of days following the surgery. I remember waking up in the early hours of the morning and seeing the red line of the blood bag. In the morning I underwent ear surgery which was horrible because I could smell it when they cauterised my ear.

18. The accident happened the year before I was diagnosed with Gilbert's syndrome. I wasn't wearing a seat belt and I went through the windscreen. My eye lid was hanging down and I had plastic surgery on my right ear and had it stitched back together. I was put on morphine after that operation.

19. When I was 16 years old, I was diagnosed with Gilbert's syndrome which is where the liver produces too much bilirubin enzyme, which is the enzyme that breaks down fat. However, when you are HCV positive the bilirubin is very high as well so I don't actually know if I have Gilberts disease.

20. I have had 5 spinal surgeries, two in Belgium and one in Dorset. We lived in Belgium for one year but moved back to the UK in 2019. Of the two spinal operations I had in Belgium, one was routine and the other resulted from lifting heavy plasterboard. I didn't have any other surgeries in Belgium and I was not given a blood transfusions there. I recently injured my back and was rushed in for surgery.

21. I found out that I had HCV when I was 20 years old. I was living in GRO-C at the time and following this diagnosis effectively went off-grid. I had lots of symptoms of HCV, one of which was extreme fatigue so I asked my doctor to look into it. However I tested negative for both Hepatitis A and B.

22. HCV is normally associated with drug use but I have never injected drugs. I had tattoos done in 1995 when I was 15 years old and the doctors tried to put the HCV down to something like that. Really because they didn't have a clue how I had contracted the virus. I was told that my HCV may have been caused by tattoos or sex, but no one narrowed it down as to where I got it from. Then a doctor in Poole Hospital suggested that it was more likely caught through unprotected sex. To me this was very unlikely.

Treatment

23. I was not offered any treatment following my diagnosis and it wasn't until I was living in GRO-C in 2008-2009, that I was offered treatment for the first time, but I had to be taken off it after a short time as it made me aggressive. A couple of years later in 2010 or 2011, I had a second round of treatment.

24. I was placed under the care of Dr Sharer who was a consultant gastroenterologist liver specialist at Poole Hospital. I was referred to him for treatment. After the blood test was done, he asked for a repeat test as there was not enough serum to figure out my genotype.

25. When I was first diagnosed the doctor said that a lot of people can live with HCV and not know they have it. However, my HCV came to light because at the time I was a heavy drinker and I was tested for HCV. I was living in Bath at that stage. The doctor told me to prepare myself for the result. I remember getting the letter saying that I had HCV. I was told that there was no cure and all they could do was treat the symptoms.

26. I was diagnosed with Genotype 1 and I started treatment of pegylated Interferon - 180mcg and Ribavirin – 600mcg in 2008. I had an Injection of Interferon once a week and I took Ribavirin tablets every day. The treatment was supposed to last for 48 weeks - but I couldn't tolerate it as, mentioned previously, it made me aggressive.

27. I was trying to find a reason as to how I was infected with HCV. I have never taken intravenous drugs for recreational use. My first tattoo was professionally done when I was 15 years old in King Street in South Shields, in a proper tattoo parlour. So I always thought it very unlikely that I would have caught it through that. In terms of relationships, I always wore protection as I didn't want a little one of me running around! I was a heavy drinker when diagnosed with HCV. It wasn't

really until they did the test on my liver that they found out that I had HCV.

28. I had a liver biopsy in around 2004-2005. I recall I had to lie on my side for the liver biopsy. They confirmed there was no cirrhosis of my liver but they detected the start of liver damage.

29. When I told the doctors that I had never taken drugs, the clinicians didn't believe me and would question me, saying thigs like, "are you sure?" I would be looked at in a quizzical manner as if they did not believe my response. My partner has noticed this in letters we now have between my GPs and the hospital doctors. That is why I am not surprised the doctors reacted that way.

30. The length of the HCV treatment and effectiveness depends on your genotype. There are different genotypes, some are easier to treat and only take 6 months and some harder and it takes a year of treatment to clear the virus. Some genotypes had a 75 percent chance of successfully clearing the virus. My genotype was the harder one to treat. That was the worst year of my life. Because of my genotype I was only given a 50/50 percent chance of the treatment working. I had to take the medication for a year.

31. I was under the care of Dr Sharer and Sister Hazel Allen at Poole General hospital. She was both a specialist nurse and a liver specialist. She was lovely, and really was the mother everyone wanted to have.

32. I was warned before commencing treatment that if I had aggression or appetite problems the medication would exacerbate everything. They told me that the treatment would make any underlying conditions that I have worse, for example, poor sleep.

33. I began the treatment in February but it sent me psychotic. That is why I gave up the first round of treatment. I became aggressive and couldn't

eat anything. The treatment was meant to last 12 months but I only lasted on it for 1 month. After one week of anti-viral treatment, I had issues with anxiety where I suffered with breathlessness, irritability and aggression. I was only getting between 1 to 2 hours of sleep a night. I went to see the doctor 2 weeks after commencing the treatment as I was worried about how the medication adversely affected me. There was an incident whereby I was arrested by armed police outside Poole Hospital and it took 10 officers to hold me down. I told Dr Sharer that I should come off the treatment. When I 'lost it' with the police outside the hospital I was sectioned under the Mental Health Act. I was seen by the police doctor in a room at a psychiatric hospital and the police doctor said that there was nothing wrong with. It took 26 weeks for me to become less aggressive. I recently acquired my medical notes and have a seen a letter which states that my mood was by then less aggressive.

34. When I had HCV I had pain and aching in my liver. Recently I again experienced aching pain in my liver because my liver became inflamed. It felt like it was inflamed and pressing on my rib cage especially when I lay down.

Effects of treatment

35. I started the first round of treatment in February 2007, which as mentioned, I had to stop after a short time. After I was taken off the first course of treatment, I had to wait a further 2 years before I was referred back by Hazel Allen, the specialist nurse.

36. I began the second round of treatment in 2010/2011 and which lasted 12 months. It was the same course of treatment of Interferon and Ribavirin. My Medication was delivered by courier once a month along with a sharps box which I had to take to the pharmacy when full.

37. I suffered ups and downs of the effects of the treatment. Towards the end of the treatment, it was a lot easier and the symptoms were not as bad. I

am not sure if this was because the virus had gone or because my body was getting used to the medication. It was worse when I initially started the treatment and it took more than a few days in bed to recover.

38. For the second round of treatment, I was told that it was not 100 percent certain that the treatment would work, but fortunately it did. There was no mention of costs though, and I don't think the doctor was actually bothered about that aspect.

39. Before the first round of treatment, I was a heavy drinker but in order to be accepted for the second round of treatment, Hazel Allen, the nurse specialist, made me promise to stop drinking. So, I was largely teetotal for the 2nd round, other than the occasional beer. Hazel, told me to eat healthier food especially when I was taking the HCV treatment, even if having just a snack she told me to make sure it was the right food.

40. It took a lot of talking to the doctor to get put back on the treatment. He was dubious about putting me through it a second time. It took 2 or 3 attempts to get the second course of treatment. Hazel Allen spoke on my behalf and fought for me. She got the doctor to give me the second course of treatment. The doctors were worried that I wouldn't complete the treatment, so I had to give assurances that I would complete it.

41. Before putting me on the treatment they wrote to my GP in respect of my mental health issues and asked if I was okay to have it the treatment

42. I was put on anti-depressants and I was given Zopiclone to help me sleep. The fatigue was so bad, making it hard to get out of bed most days. There were days when I felt hopeless; I thought it wasn't worth it and I thought of committing suicide a couple of times. A few times I got to that point and thought to myself, "Is it worth it?" If it wasn't for my best mate I wouldn't be here now.

43. My bilirubin and ALT levels were raised and through the roof, and were very worrying. In 2004 they were 249 then rose to 348 in 2006 and in 2008 my levels were 461. Sister Hazel Allen told me the results certainly suggested a fairly aggressive disease.

44. By this time the success rate for the treatment had gone up to 80 percent for the second course of treatment rather than the earlier 50 percent. But I had to finish the treatment to stop it coming back. I made sure the injections were always taken on a Friday as it took me 2 days to recover. Two days after the injection every muscle in my body ached and I was just run down. It felt like it was the worst flu I'd ever had.

45. I finished the treatment in August 2011. The medical notes I have, records that I had my last injection on 25 August 2011. Following this I returned for a check-up after 1 month, then 6 months; then a year. It showed that the virus was still untraceable in my blood and that I had cleared it.

46. I will never be able to give blood again because of HCV antibodies in my blood.

47. I have been feeling fatigued and jaundiced lately and so to rule anything out I asked the doctor to do a test about 7 weeks ago. I had bone tests done and a HCV test, but the HCV test result was not back at the time of giving my statement.

48. In December 2002 my Bilirubin was flagged as raised from an earlier test in August, where my levels were also raised from the white blood cell count.

49. I was diagnosed last year with ADHD. It cost £400 per month for the medication and the consultation fee was £170. Now the NHS has taken over but there is a 2-year waiting list. I am also on a waiting list for a ASD assessment.

Section 3. Other Infections

50. I am not aware of having contracted any other infection other than HCV as a result of receiving contaminated blood.

Section 4. Consent

51. I am not aware of having been tested for anything else other than HCV without my knowledge or consent.

Section 5. Impact

52. I suffered from aggression because of the HCV treatment and the treatment I was taking for borderline personality disorder didn't help. GRO-C

GRO-C

53. It is my belief I have carried the effects of HCV my whole life. If I hadn't had HCV I feel I might have done better in life

54. GRO-C

55. My aggression cost me a relationship. I had been in that relationship for 5 years I left because I didn't want her kids to see me like that.

56. It's my belief the aggression and my HCV status are linked. A lot of it happened was when I feeling fatigue and worn out. I get ratty and irritable because of HCV. I spent a lot of time run down and worn out and it makes

me short fused and bad tempered. My history has influenced my present status and my history sticks with me. Anyone who knows me knows that I GRO-C for aggression. Anyone who goes through GRO-C GRO-C will see that these things are flagged. Aggression is also recorded in my medical notes. It sticks with everything.

57. GRO-C

58. I tried to kill myself a couple of times. I took 2 overdoses in 2009 and 2010 and ended up in hospital a couple of times because of the overdoses. I overdosed on Quetapine which is an anti-psychotic treatment and an overdose of opioids - Oxcycontal opiates. I also overdosed on morphine when I was on strong painkillers because of my back. I overdosed on Fentynal patches too. On one occasion the paramedics gave me an injection to bring me back round, because I had stopped breathing.

Stigma:

59. When I first received the HCV diagnosis, I thought it was like HIV so I didn't bother telling anyone. I always declared it in a relationship after I'd had the treatment. There were a couple of occasions, when learning of my HCV status, girls would do a runner. If I was with a partner, I obviously had to tell them, but I tried not to tell anyone else. To this day some members of my family still don't know.

60. I never really told anyone about it. With regards to relationships a lot of women run when they hear you have HCV. People back off and treat you differently. They would step back away from you as it has a stigma around it. They certainly acted differently towards me. People think HCV is like HIV so obviously, they are going to stand off even if they don't mean it.

61. I shut myself off from world and had no contact with anyone. I was working night shifts so it was better for me and I slept all day. I was determined to complete the treatment and give myself a chance of getting rid of the HCV.

62. None of my family knew about my infection until years later and really only my best friend, who is godfather to my daughter, and maybe one or two others. It was easier not to tell anyone about it because they treated me differently when I did tell them. So I cut myself off and I kept away.

63. Every time I went for dental treatment the dentist wore the whole full mask and face shields, it used to make me feel bad. One dentist even refused to see me because of HCV and some put my appointment to the end of the day, but I always declared the HCV to them.

64. Similarly whenever I required surgery in hospital, they always kept me to the end of the theatre list because of the risk of contamination. I underwent spinal surgery in 2008 and I had my varicose veins operated on at Bournemouth Hospital. They told me that because of the risk of infection they didn't want anyone else getting it, so my operation was bumped to the end of the day. The clinician's words were, "you've got an infection" and I was bumped to end of day.

65. If I cut myself, I was frightened because if I infected anyone else, I wouldn't be able to live with myself.

Financial impact:

66. My life insurance doubled and cost a lot more money because I have had a contagious blood disease. Even though I was no longer infected they said that it was because I'd had it, even though I am clear.

67. In terms of job prospects, I spent a lot of time off sick from work because some days I was too tired to get out of bed. So as a result, I lost a lot of

jobs due to bad attendance. However, at the time they thought I was out drinking and trying to pull a fast one.

68. In term of educational impact, I didn't do well at school. I couldn't concentrate so, I spent a lot of time out of school because of what was going on with my health. I later went to boarding school because of my misbehaving and disruptive behaviour.

69. I left school with no qualifications. I wanted to be a vet when I was younger and wanted to join the military police in the army, but I couldn't do the basic training because I was tired all the time and I was too fatigued to do the training.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

70. As far as I remember HCV was never mentioned by any clinicians prior to my formal diagnosis. I was not given adequate and appropriate treatment, care or support. I think I should have been treated earlier. It was Hazel who fought for me to be given the 2nd round of treatment. I was told at one stage that because of how aggressive my genotype was, it would have led to cirrhosis of the liver had I not been treated.

71. Prior to the HIV test, I was given counselling to prepare myself in case it was positive.

72. I didn't face any obstacles in getting treatment and treatment was recommended once I was referred to Dr Sharere. They told me they could help me with my symptoms when I was first diagnosed with HCV but that there was no cure.

73. When I was taken off the first course of treatment, due to my psychotic reaction, I had to wait a further 2 years later before I was referred back to the doctor for treatment by Hazel, the nurse specialist who persuaded them to put me back on the treatment.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

74. I never heard about any financial assistance being available and no one ever told me anything, other than when I was told by the Infected Blood Inquiry Investigator.

75. I think I should have been alerted to the availability of financial support for the simple fact that I didn't know where I got the HCV from. I believe someone should have informed me about the schemes and help available.

76. I intend to apply for financial assistance and have requested an England Infected Blood Support Scheme application form to start the process.

77. I have recently requested my medical records form the Freeman Hospital but some of the documents I received have been heavily redacted and the Freeman Hospital has refused to supply unredacted copies. As mentioned earlier, I intend to apply for my mother's medical records as well.

Section 8. Other Issues

78. It was only because my partner researched HCV and she saw a newspaper article in the Chronicle a few months ago in September or October 2022, which mentioned the Infected Blood Inquiry. She was interested in researching HCV because I never knew where it came from and because the Inquiry are looking at events up to 1991. I had been through a lot and she asked me if I had ever had HCV mentioned to me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C: Darren Bass

Dated 3-4-23