



Witness Name: Gillian Holcombe

Statement No.: WITN7642001

Exhibits: **WITN7642002-003**

Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GILLIAN SUE HOLCOMBE**

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

I, Gillian Sue Holcombe, will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is Gillian Sue Holcombe. My date of birth is GRO-C 1938 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am married and live in Devon with my husband Rod, a retired GP. I worked as a paediatric nurse but am now retired. I did my general training in London and Taunton and then went to Westminster Children's Hospital for my paediatrics course. We moved to our current house in 1967.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV), which I contracted as a result of receiving an anti-D immunoglobulin injection after the birth of my son.

3. I can confirm that I have not chosen to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. I am not seeking anonymity in relation to my statement.
4. I can also confirm that the Inquiry Investigator has explained to me the 'Right to Reply' procedure, and that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.
5. I wish to acknowledge that naturally as time passes, memories can fade. I have been able to provide approximate timeframes to matters based on life events. During the interview for this statement, my husband was with me to assist with some details.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

6. My son, Andrew, was born on GRO-C 1969 under the care of Mr J G Dumoulin at Plymouth General Hospital. My blood groups is O Rhesus Negative, so shortly after the birth of my son, a sample of his blood was taken from the umbilical cord. He was found to be Rhesus positive, and it was suggested there could be a trans-placental leakage. I was therefore advised to have an appropriate blood product (which I now know was an anti-D immunoglobulin injection) for safety with any future pregnancies.
7. I remember being told that if I did not receive the injection, my future children may require an exchanged blood transfusion, but I was not told specifically what I was receiving. I was kept in hospital for 4-5 days after the birth of my son, and the anti-D injection would have therefore been administered in that time.
8. There was no mention at any stage that there may be a risk attached to the receipt of the anti-D injection.

9. I can confirm that my son Andrew was healthy and did not have any health complications after the birth.
10. I had always been a regular blood donor and went to donate blood at the Bristol Blood Donor Centre in Southmead, 6 months after the birth of my son, as this was the procedure. Within a matter of weeks, a letter arrived from the centre to say that my blood donation could not be used because I had tested positive for Hepatitis C (HCV). The letter did not specify my genotype, but I was told to inform both my GP and dentist that I had Australian Antibodies, and to tell my employer that I could not work as a nurse all the time that I had an active infection. I was completely shocked to discover my HCV positive status and I felt shocked and at a loss as to what might be the result.
11. The information provided about the virus was minimal and insufficient. I was not given any information on infection management and how to protect my husband and son from contracting the virus. I now understand that I could have passed the infection onto others rather easily, but I did not know this at the time, Whilst I feel as though I was kept in the dark, it was the very early days and at that stage not much was known about HCV, even within the health profession.
12. I have never been an intravenous drug user, nor had a relationship with anyone who was. I have no tattoos and I only have my ears pierced, which were done soon after we married in the local jewellers. I have never received major medical treatment abroad and have never had a blood transfusion. Therefore, the only viable source of infection is the anti-D immunoglobulin injection I received after my son's birth

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

13. I do not believe I have received any infection other than HCV as a result of receiving an anti-D immunoglobulin injection.

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

14. The anti-D immunoglobulin injection was administered with my consent, but I was not warned of any risk of infection. I was just told that it was something I needed to take in order to protect future pregnancies and no full explanation was provided.
15. I have no reason to believe that I was ever treated or tested for the purposes of research without my full knowledge or consent.

#### **Section 5. Impact**

16. At no point did I experienced any symptoms of the HCV infection and I have no signs of impaired health since the viral load became undetectable. Fortunately, to this day I remain seemingly well and normal, although this could have been entirely different. I am well aware that I am one of the 'lucky' ones who did not suffer any serious or life changing events as a result of the infection.
17. Following my diagnosis with HCV, I was asked to attend the blood transfusion office at Freedom Fields Hospital, Plymouth (which no longer exists) every month to provide a blood sample. I would receive a phone call with the results of my viral count and told to return in four weeks. No offer of treatment was made and after a period of 8 months, I was told the virus was undetectable.
18. I have had no follow up since my body naturally cleared the infection.
19. When I told my dentist, he completely overreacted to my HCV positive status, which caused some disquiet and an altered routine – my appointments were always at the end of the dental surgery session and extra measures were put in place to protect other patients. He became very obsessional and always wore a mask and gloves, he did not wear a gown but with any procedure, he stepped back as far as possible. I

found his behaviour embarrassing and felt as though I was causing extra work and worry for those concerned. Dentists wearing a mask was not routine at that time.

20. When I told the dentist that I had cleared the infection, he did not say anything at all and there was no reaction. I do not remember whether he continued to wear a mask whilst treating me, but he retired soon after. To confirm, I have had no difference in treatment with any other dental professionals.
21. I had my second child in GRO-C 1973 and was placed in a room with another patient who said she was a GP, who was expecting her first child. I mentioned that I also worked in the medical profession and so we started talking. During our conversation, the subject came up about my HCV infection and within a couple of hours she asked to be moved out of the room, which she was. I thought her reaction was ridiculous considering I had cleared the virus and had returned to work as a nurse.
22. Not long after our daughter was born, I received a letter from my consultant, which was addressed 'Dear Mrs Australian Antibody and Daughter.' I presume the reference was a result of the GP's reaction towards me in the hospital. It was meant in a light-hearted way.
23. I never told anyone outside the immediate family about my HCV infection because of the stigma attached to the virus and as such I did not experience any adverse reactions from those in the wider community.
24. I was not able to work as a nursing sister whilst I had a positive HCV status, which resulted in some loss of income and additional explanations to colleague, which sometimes resulted in rebuttal. I explained to my boss that I could not come in to work, but did not say too much other than that I had a blood issue that was possibly infectious. They were fine about this and instructed me to make contact

once I could return. No medical professional said that I could go back to work, but I asked the hospital once I cleared the infection and they got in touch with the Blood Transfusion Service who approved this.

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

25. I do not believe that I have faced any difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment, care and support. The fact that my body cleared the virus naturally and within 8 months, negated the need for any treatment.

26. I have never been offered any counselling or psychological support in relation to my infection with HCV, but this is not something that I would have sought considering the impact was minimal.

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

27. No medical professional has ever mentioned financial support available to those infected as a result of the contaminated blood scandal.

28. The Inquiry investigator explained the EIBSS scheme to me, and has provided me with their contact details. I will consider making contact with them to explain my situation.

29. I feel that I have been very lucky insofar that there has been little impact as a result of my HCV infection and view myself as on the peripheral in terms of financial assistance.

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

30. I saw a local solicitor when the Inquiry was announced, but he said that I was too late to get involved and there was not much point in progressing the matter further. I did not like how I was dismissed and I left the meeting feeling as though my case did not matter.

31. My husband wrote to Jeremy Hunt on 11 November 2022 asking how to join the number of recipients who received infected blood products and whether there was any recognition of the possible health and social consequences of the procedure (please refer to exhibit **WITN7642002**). He received a reply to say he was no longer Health Secretary and all communication should be forwarded on to his successor as well as making contact with the Infected Blood Inquiry.
32. Following this communication, my husband wrote to the Inquiry in early 2023 expressing the consideration and evaluation of my case. Please refer to exhibit **WITN7642003**.
33. To date, I have not made any attempt to retrieve my hospital and GP records from the time when the anti-D immunoglobulin injection was administered and when I tested positive for HCV. I am therefore unsure whether this information has been retained.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

17 March 8<sup>th</sup> 2023