Statement from Daniel Hughes for HCVets on 21 October 2015.

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. My statement serves two purposes today. One purpose is to identify for you how the multi use needleless jet injection guns were operated from a user’s perspective. The second purpose is to express, although briefly, the terrible consequences of spending over 40 years infected with hepatitis C and without treatment.

In 1975 I was a young E5 working as a medical corpsman at Fort Sam Houston. I was on my second enlistment in the United States Army and had elected to transfer to Fort Sam Houston as part of my reenlistment package. My first three years were spent in the infantry mostly at Fort Lewis Washington. My first duty assignment at Fort Sam Houston was in the medical intensive care unit and at that time we were only allowed to work there for 12 consecutive months. At the end of 12 consecutive months we were evaluated and given the opportunity to transfer out. I elected to transfer out to get out from under shiftwork. My next assignment was clinic number one in the medical training area. This clinic served as the primary sick call for all of the armies enlisted medical trainees. I do not recall the specific day or date but I was ordered following sick call to accompany SSgt. Elisha Bush on to a special detail. We traveled together to a large assembly area in the medical training area and I was advised that I would be giving immunizations to the trainees using the multi use needleless jet injection guns. I advised SSgt. Bush that I had not seen one of these guns since my initial medical training back in 1972. As I recall he advised me not to worry about it. Upon entering the assembly area I noticed tables laid out and on those tables were black cases. Inside the black cases were the multi use needleless jet injection guns and the associated foot pedals (the trigger mechanism). The tables were covered with white hospital sheets and some of the guns were already out of the cases lying on top of the sheets. The message to me was made clear, as the line progressed I would take up one station and as a soldier approached my station I would advise them to relax. I was advised to use my left hand to support the soldiers arm while I placed the tip of the multi use jet injection gun against the deltoid muscle of that arm and using my right foot I pushed the trigger. Then I would order the soldier forward with the simple command of “next”. At this time I would like to make the point that none of us, the medics present, wore any sort of protective gear. We did not wear latex gloves; we did not cover our faces with disposable masks. We did not take any personal protective precautions whatsoever. Additionally I was advised that if any of the soldiers that I had just performed the inoculation on began to bleed I was to wipe the blood off their arm with a dry 4 x 4 gauze pad and then move that soldier up in the line. At no time was the multi use needleless jet injection gun cleaned or even inspected to see if any blood was on the nozzle. My orders were just to keep shooting arms and to keep the line moving until the multidose vial was emptied or the line was exhausted.

As a medic and as someone who’s worked in the medical field off and on over the years there’s never been a doubt in my mind that the hepatitis C virus could have been, should have been, and most likely was passed from one soldier to another where these guns were used.

I was successfully treated for hepatitis C in 2007. I was treated with interferon and ribavirin for 48 weeks in what I can only describe as one of the most stressful years of my life. I have been free and clear of the virus now for many years. 2007 was the year the nightmare stopped for me. I probably contracted hepatitis C in 1973, my second year in the Army when I received nearly 200 units of blood in a transfusion that saved my life but left me with a small gift that continued to affect me from that day forward. So while I am grateful that the treatment worked for me I know that there are many others out there like me, honorable veterans who served their country who’ve been infected and do not even know it. I didn’t know until 1999. I wonder how many thousands of my veteran brothers and sisters have flu like symptoms, abdominal pain, excruciating joint pains, bouts of depression and lethargy for which there is no diagnosis, for which no doctor can explain? That’s the gift that hepatitis C left for me and that was the struggle I had for over 40 years. In my few words here in this testimony, in this brief session I cannot begin to tell of the agony and the suffering that hepatitis C has caused me and my family over these many years. Being free and clear of the virus is not altogether accurate. The antibodies of HCV remain in me and the presence has kept me from getting long term disability insurance, life insurance and I have been excluded from some job opportunities due to the presence of HCV in my blood. Some of the symptoms, although not as intense or as regular also remain for me. I still have joint pains and all of the precursors of rheumatoid arthritis. I have had one hand repaired surgically, one knee replaced and another that will be replaced next year. My gall bladder was removed last year due to stones. These are all the results of chronic HCV infection.

Please consider carefully the words of my testimony, the presentations given and those statements that follow me. I don’t believe that any reasonable person who understands the very basics of science can with a clean conscience say that there is no way that the multi use needleless jet injection guns did not pass hepatitis C from one soldier to another.

Submitted respectfully,

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