

Witness Name: Professor Colin Fink

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits:

Dated:

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PROFESSOR COLIN FINK

I, Professor Colin Fink, will say as follows: -

1. This statement is provided in support of Module 7 of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry.
2. Micropathology Ltd is a (unique- In Europe) diagnostic and research company providing a rapid diagnostic daily service for serious infection to more than 200 NHS hospitals, the major private hospital providers in the UK and the main hospitals in the Republic of Ireland. All our diagnostic work is based on the identification and sequencing of pathogen unique sequences of DNA and RNA and provides an exquisitely¹ sensitive series of assays (tests which will detect down to single gene copies of pathogens) developed in-house and validated and verified to ISO 15189 and UKAS accredited standards.
3. In December 2019 our postdoctoral scientific staff recognised the risks of the newly noted respiratory disease in Wuhan China. As a precautionary measure they developed, verified and validated an assay capable of diagnosing this infection and based on published RNA sequence data from CDC Atlanta USA. Starting in January 2020 all respiratory samples coming into our laboratory for expected

¹ The use of the term 'exquisitely' refers to the ability to detect down to the gene level - unparalleled in any other biological detection system. A delicate and remarkable process.

winter respiratory viruses, were also screened as an epidemiological study, for this new pathogen and on March 5th 2020 we found our first UK positive sample.

4. In April / May 2020 The Public Health Laboratory in Colindale London (PHLS) subsequently renamed as the United Kingdom Health and Security Agency (UKHSA), issued a directive to all UK NHS hospitals that they were advised not to use 'private' (commercial) laboratories for the diagnosis of this infection. Unfortunately, no adequate alternative provider was apparent and it became known that the PHLS newly developed assay for COVID was failing to diagnose up to 25 % of the positive specimens. I wrote to the scientists concerned at PHLS and offered them our fully validated assay, free of charge. There was no response. Around this time our scientists developed a rapid RNA/DNA sample extraction method which reduced the need for reagents which by then, were heavily in world demand for the newly emerging pandemic diagnostic services. This published method: Molecular detection of SARS-CoV-2 using a reagent-free approach (Calvez R, Taylor A, Calvo-Bado L, Fraser D, Fink CG PLoS One. 2020 Dec 7;15(12):e0243266) also reduced the diagnostic exercise to 1.5 hrs and hugely improved throughput of samples.
5. All the hospitals we served then, except one who sent their samples to Germany (to a private laboratory), ignored the PHLS advice and we were undertaking the diagnosis of up to 4000 samples a day, 7 days a week for this SARS COV-2 (COVID) pathogen from hospitals across the UK. We continued during this pandemic service, with our normal daily work for all the other pathogens within our diagnostic service. During this time Andrew Gilligan, a Journalist, co-opted to No 10 Downing Street, phoned us to ask whether we would give up our ten RNA/DNA sample extraction robots. We declined this suggestion, as these were in daily use for this work. Later we found out that the intention was to ship this equipment to Randox laboratories in Northern Ireland.
6. In November 2020 we engaged in a ZOOM meeting with a NR, Name Redacted a representative of Deloitte who seemed authorised to set up the mega laboratory in Leamington Spa. At that time we had 26 years of rapid diagnostic assay development and laboratory rapid diagnostic service

experience and we had privately estimated that we could set up a high through put facility in the University Science Park for about 15 % cost of the later published £1.1 billion which was finally spent on the Mega laboratory in Leamington. Our offer, carefully studied and accounted, with accommodation then available within the University of Warwick Science Park, was not entertained by NR from Deloitte. It became apparent a little later that the University Medical School saw this potential 'Mega lab' creation as an opportunity to 'train' scientists to work in this new laboratory. Unfortunately, the medical school had had no experience in this diagnostic area, but the income stream was attractive.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 29th April 2025