

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN0878

Dated: 15th June 2019**INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY****WRITTEN STATEMENT OF** GRO-B

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

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B. My date of birth is GRO-B 1965 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I am married and live with my husband in GRO-B Norfolk. Professionally, I am a qualified Food Technologist. I worked for many years as a Product Development Technologist and now work in catering and hospitality. In my spare time, I lead a team of volunteers with my husband, running a drop-in service for those who are homeless or in need of other support, at my local church.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me and the impact it had on me and my family.

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3. I have decided that this scandal relates to events in the past and publicising my identity will not add value. I have, therefore, chosen to provide this statement anonymously.
4. I attempt to recall certain dates in my statement. Due to the passage of time these should be viewed as an approximation.

How Infected

5. It is my belief that I was infected with HCV as a result of receiving a contaminated blood transfusion during corrective surgery for spinal scoliosis (major surgery to treat a curved and twisted spine) at the GRO-B in the summer of 1982 when I was 16 years of age. I turned 17 in the GRO-B of that year.

Background

6. I got married to my husband in GRO-B when I was GRO-B years of age. My husband and I wanted children; however, we were conscious of the biological time limitations – the older you are the harder it is to have children. We made a pragmatic decision not to have children once we reached a certain age as we wanted to be there for and capable of looking after them.
7. After trying unsuccessfully to conceive for 18 months we visited our GP. The GP said that IVF was less accessible on the NHS for women over 40. They, however, ordered some preliminary blood tests for both my husband and I to determine whether it was an option, should we decide to proceed with treatment.
8. I was asked to come back a couple of weeks later to discuss the results. The GP asked whether I had ever been an intravenous drug user, to which I replied that I had never been a drug user of any kind. I

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remember being completely shocked. At the time I worked for a drug and alcohol charity, as an administrator, so I understood the implications of the question (i.e. possible infection with Hepatitis or HIV through the use of contaminated shared needles) and I wondered what on earth had come back in the test results. The GP explained that one of the tests had detected the presence of HCV antibodies in my blood – which meant that at some point I had been infected with HCV. The test for HIV was negative.

9. I mentioned that I worked for a charity that helps drug users. As part of my employment, I had received extensive health and safety training. I, therefore, had some knowledge about how these viruses were transmitted. Also, as part of the training of volunteers for the drop-in we run GRO-B we have policies and procedures in place to ensure our volunteers are safe. I knew that nothing I had done in my life put me at risk.
10. When we were discussing the possible causes, we talked about my corrective surgery for spinal scoliosis. During the surgery, which lasted several hours, I had received a significant number of units of blood (I seem to recall being told it was 7 pints of blood). The GP said that it was likely that the HCV infection was as a result of receiving this transfusion. They determined that I needed to be referred for a liver scan and PCR to understand whether I still had the live virus.
11. The GP was kind and compassionate about my diagnosis. Other than the discussion I don't recall being given any literature to read or directed anywhere. That said, I knew some information anyway and began to do my own research online and discovered the HEP C Trust website which I found useful.
12. I remember having a chat around whether or not I could pass HCV on. I cannot, however, remember whether I asked for this information or whether it was offered. At this point I was told that we should stop

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trying for children whilst the tests were being carried out, as they would not want me to be pregnant should treatment have been necessary. I found this difficult to hear as it felt like my life was being put on hold and the opportunity for having children was slipping away from me.

13. Following the referral, I visited Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. They carried out the two tests – 12 weeks apart. The results showed the liver had a small amount of fat but there was no damage and I appeared to have cleared the virus naturally.

14. Neither my husband nor I recall whether they gave us any more information on HCV at this point. We knew someone that had undergone treatment without success so we were quite anxious.

15. In 2018, my GP practice contacted me to say that there was a more conclusive test to detect the presence of the live virus. For my own peace of mind, I took the test to ensure I was clear. Thankfully I was.

16. At the time of my spinal surgery I remember consenting to the procedure but do not recall specifically consenting to having a transfusion. I do not recall being given any literature nor do I remember the risks of transfusion being explained to me. The main risk I remember being discussed with me was damage to the spinal cord due to the nature of the operation. I believe, however, that transfusions were part and parcel of the surgery and routine at the time. Moreover, without surgery it was explained that I would possibly have only lived until I was around 30 years of age due to the restriction on my breathing if the condition continued to get worse.

Other Infections

17. I do not believe I have received any other infections other than HCV as a result of the blood transfusion.

Impact

18. Shortly after having the surgery I suffered with depression and my mental health was not good. I remember being a happy go lucky teenager but had low mood and felt down after the operation. I am, however, not sure this was related to being infected with HCV. I had to lie flat for 4-5 weeks after the operation and then wear a plaster cast for 6 months. After recovering, on the whole I felt fine from a physical perspective.
19. I remember being scared, worried and shocked when I found out I had HCV antibodies in my system. Whilst the late diagnosis meant that I did not personally experience any stigma, I remember the general stigma associated with it at the time. As a result, I only shared my diagnosis with my dad, close friends and some colleagues.
20. I recall feeling 'contaminated' and felt that I would somehow be seen 'as a risk to other people' if I had a live virus slugging around in my system. Until it was confirmed I had no live virus I was very anxious about how much my liver was damaged. My mum died of pancreatic cancer so I remember having lots of questions and worry in my head around whether it would make me more susceptible to this type of thing in the future, if my liver was damaged. I had no treatment for HCV as my immune system had cleared the virus naturally.
21. Once the tests came back clear, even though I was over 40, my GP offered to refer me for IVF by submitting mitigating circumstances. However my husband and I felt that the time for children had passed. I felt robbed and short changed. We stopped trying because we did not want to be older parents – the HCV tests had disrupted and shorted the time that we had available to try for children.
22. When my husband heard the diagnosis, he thought the marriage he had hoped for would be short-lived as I would not survive for long. It felt

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as though our lives were put on hold and there was nothing we could do until the results came back. It was hard to put things on the back burner. Life was difficult but we carried on with it as best we could, for example, we both continued to work. Even last year (2018) when I went for a retest it triggered anxiety and it brought back the same worrying emotions.

Treatment/Care/Support

23. I have not faced any obstacles obtaining medical treatment because of my infection with HCV. I did mention to my dentist that I had HCV antibodies but I was not treated any differently.

24. I have not been offered any counselling or support other than the one set up by the Inquiry and run by the Red Cross. I, however, did not feel it was needed as I have a supportive partner and I'm part of a church that has great pastoral care.

Other Issues

25. I would like to see the inquiry get the widest possible picture of the events that happened in the hope that justice is served. More importantly, I hope that the people who were affected and continue to be impacted get the right care and support that they need and require.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated

15th June 2019