Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No. WITN3924001
Exhibits: WITN3924002-006
Dated: 24 / 08 / 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN WITNESS STATEMENT

OF

GRO-B

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of The Inquiry Rules, 2006 dated 25th November, 2019.

I, GRO-B will say as follows:-

Section One - Introduction

1. My full name is GRO-B (née GRO-B but I have also been known by the surname of GRO-B. I was born in Kent on GRO-B 1950. My parents had five children, all girls, of which I was the second eldest.

2. There was / is no familial history of any form of blood born ailments within the family, nothing such as haemophilia or similar blood related issues, but there was a history of cancer, on the female side of my family, and when I was younger I had contracted a Streptococcal infection, something I later found out was attributable to the fact that both my mother and two of my sisters, were carriers.

3. Having been born and initially grown up in Kent, whilst in my teens my family and I moved to the West Country where I completed my schooling and enjoyed my childhood, generally free from illness – at least, nothing more than that which is normally experienced as you grow up, flu, colds, and the sort of minor illnesses which can circulate amongst school children.

4. Following our having moved, I met my first husband and entered into a relationship with him when I was just sixteen years of age although we had known one another before then.

5. At seventeen years of age I found myself to be pregnant, but as my family were Catholics and I had grown up in the Catholic faith, this was rather difficult for my parents to accept as my boyfriend and I were unmarried. As a result, I deliberately took steps to conceal the pregnancy from my family until the very day of my having given birth.

6. I found it hard being such a young mother, especially as I lacked the parental support others may have taken comfort from with more understanding parents, but I absolutely adored my son from the moment he had been born, and not long after his birth fell pregnant with a second child, our daughter.

7. Whereas I loved both of my children without reservation, my relationship with their father became somewhat turbulent, a situation that was aggravated by his having been becoming a regular Cannabis user who on occasions became violent towards me. He hadn't been someone who used cannabis when we'd first met, but he started using it and his usage increased with a detrimental consequences of which his conduct towards me was one.

8. Within a couple of years, I fell pregnant for the third time but on this occasion I experienced complications carrying the child, and this led to my having to enter hospital for a termination by way of some form of Caesarian Section procedure.

9. I do not, and have never been a believer in termination, although I fully appreciate that they may be necessary on occasions or as a matter of personal choice, but my feelings meant that I found it really difficult to come to terms with this loss and the manner in which it happened – it remains something which has played on my mind ever since.

10. A couple of years later, I again had to go into hospital when some unexplained 'lumps' were found in my tummy. A surgeon operated, to resolve the issue, and having done so told me that one of the lumps had been removed for examination to determine its nature.

11. It turned out to have been non-malignant endometrial tissue, but my consultant told me that things had not gone 'as planned' during surgery and that he had been compelled to *"go much deeper"* than he may otherwise have wished to have done.

12. I do not know for certain, as on each occasion the surgery was conducted under a general anaesthetic, but believe that I may well have been given a blood transfusion on the first, if not both occasions, i.e. when I had the termination *and / or* when the endometrial tissue was surgically removed.

13. At the time of the tissue removal, there had been other ladies on the ward with me who were also post-op' patients, and whereas they walked around the ward with their transfusions on a stand which they pushed around with them, I didn't, but I happen to know that although not 'mobile' as they were, I too received a blood transfusion at this time (which I will detail later within this statement).

14. I stayed with him, initially for the sake of our children, in an attempt to establish a family, but by the age of twenty four I had realised that our relationship was untenable, so I took our children, and left him – their safety, and mine, had become my only priority by that time, and I left knowing that I could not expose us to any further risk as his poor behaviour continued.

15. I had by then married, but sadly my parents were never really supportive and although I would take the children to visit them weekly, and they knew my husband to be violent, I was nevertheless left to understand that I was very much on my own. Having fallen pregnant outside of wedlock, they did not approve, and did not approve of the marriage either, something they showed with the breakdown of my relationship as that too went against their Catholic principals. My parents feared that I had been setting a poor example before my sisters, and as such would not or could not bring themselves to, support me.

16. Being unable to rely upon them, and having had to leave a violent, abusive relationship, I managed to find a property, and moved in with my two children and was happy there – it was a derelict cottage, but my needs were urgent so in spite of its poor condition, we moved in.

17. Some five years after having separated from my first husband, I met the man who was to become my second husband. As we had both previously been married, neither of us had any intentions of 'rushing into' a fresh relationship, and so ours gradually developed over time, as a strengthening friendship.

18. As this was going on, my children and I moved into another property, which like that before it was a derelict house requiring work, but we needed more space, and as I'd managed to sort out the first, one which I had been effectively forced into out of necessity, I moved into this property far less concerned by what was required.

19. After a while, my boyfriend also moved in and helped me to renovate the building whilst also helping look after the children who also grew to admire and then love him, as I did. We then went on to have a child together, another girl.

20. By then, I was thirty-four years old. My first two deliveries had been natural births, and although a Caesarian Delivery was discussed, the third child also proved to be a natural birth without the need for any such clinical intervention.

21. Using this statement, I intend to tell the Infected Blood Inquiry how I came to be infected with Hepatitis C, the impact this has had upon me, its treatment and legacy.

Section Two - How Infected

22. In 1987, in a loving, stable relationship and with three children, I fell pregnant again. My General Practitioner (GP) at that time offered me an Amniocentesis test, a procedure which allows the clinicians to check the unborn child for abnormalities.

23. At the time, I had been working with children who had disabilities, and perhaps because of the nature of my work, any concerns I may have harboured as to this pregnancy were heightened, and I was in two minds as to whether or not to submit to the test, but I did, and went into a hospital, in Poole, Dorset for the procedure.

24. I had the amniocentesis, and almost immediately began 'spotting' and just three weeks later I began to feel that something, I couldn't say what, exactly, but 'something' wasn't right, in particular I had started to experience really strong, painful stomach cramps.

25. A doctor called upon me at home, and told me that I was pregnant with a perfectly healthy baby daughter, which was reassuring to hear, but then only a few hours later, later that same night, as I lay in bed I realised that I was bleeding.

26. My bleeding was both heavy (significant) and continuous and I can still recall having got out of bed and lain on the sofa where towels had needed to be used in an effort to soak up the blood I was losing and which was pooling all around me.

27. My husband called for a doctor to attend, and our GP, a Dr. GRO-B GRO-B came to the house. I was aware of Dr GRO-B having something of a reputation for 'ambivalence' amongst some of his patients, and for being someone 'loathed to intervene' unless compelled to do so. This was exactly what I found when without examining me, but merely observing me from the door, he discouraged me from going into hospital, telling me that if I did, 'they' would *"... whip the child away ..."*

28. I was really dismayed at his approach and concerned by his advice, or rather the lack of it, and found him to have acted in a callous and unsympathetic manner, especially considering my age, concerns and condition.

29. In spite of his having steered me away from doing so, I decided to go to hospital as things were so bad that I honestly believed that were I to stay where I was, I could easily have bled to death, so an ambulance was called.

30. An ambulance crew arrived, examined me, saw the blood and the extent of my bleeding, and promptly took me away to the local hospital by ambulance 'on blue lights' as an emergency. I can still recall that with every sharp turn or bend it felt as though blood was simply 'sloshing around' inside me. It was the sort of sensation you may have when you have drunk too much fluid, but haven't eaten anything.

31. The ambulance crew took me to the general hospital in Dorchester, Dorset where upon my receipt I was quickly sedated and taken into an operating theatre for emergency treatment (this was the West Dorset Hospital in Williams Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2JY).

32. I cannot remember if I was asked about, or told what they may do to help me, and I cannot now recall any conversation that may have taken place as regards blood transfusions, and any form of consent related to my treatment.

33. This isn't to say that no such conversations took place, merely that with the passage of time I cannot now remember any, but I do not think any such thing took place as I had been an emergency admission who had been 'rushed into' theatre having been sedated *before* any such discussions took place – perhaps there simply wasn't time, I do not know but I have no memory of ever having been told / asked for my consent for anything.

34. The following afternoon, I was released from the hospital. I was not told what had happened, why I bled as I did, or specifically how I had been treated, or with what - but I had miscarried and lost the baby I had been carrying and was left feeling bereft and traumatised by the experience.

35. For many weeks following this, on almost every night, I suffered from recurring nightmares, in particular of the ambulance journey, and I remember these nightmares to this day – my having only ever seen things in red accompanied by the sensation of blood 'sloshing about' within me.

36. In 1988 I again fell pregnant, but despite the miscarriage of the previous year, I was not offered any special measures or treatment, but was left to my own devices.

37. One day, around twelve weeks into the pregnancy, I began to experience some stomach cramps. In order to distract myself, I suggested to my husband that we take our daughter (the youngest child) to a nearby cove for a walk as it was a lovely day. I think that he knew or suspected that something wasn't right. But at the same time understood me well enough to know that I wanted to get out of the house.

38. We went for a walk, and it had the desired effect of distracting me from the worries I would otherwise have had for what may have been going on, but later that night, as I put our youngest child to bed and was reading her a night time story, I felt something within my stomach drop, and I began bleeding.

39. I rushed to finish the story, so as not to alarm our daughter, and then told my husband what was happening – that I was having another miscarriage.

40. Although still quite a traumatic episode, this time the miscarriage felt somehow 'calmer' in its nature, and I was fully aware of what was happening at the time. Our GP was called, attended and was very kind to me before calling for an ambulance and I was again taken into the hospital, and as before immediately escorted into an operating theatre.

41. I can remember, on this occasion, never having been told what was going to happen, what they would do to help me, and in particular that I was not told that I would be given a blood transfusion. I was an emergency admission and although a lot more alert and aware of what was happening, was never told.

42. After this second miscarriage, the doctors treating me encouraged me not to give up on having other children but to carry-on trying if that was what my husband and I wanted to do. After the heartache of losing two children, my husband was somewhat reluctant to do so, but I wanted to have another baby with him and to provide for another sibling for the others.

43. Within just three months I found myself pregnant again, and despite what had happened before, in 1989 gave birth to another girl, naturally and without any major complication save for the fact that at birth she presented herself in the wrong position which made the delivery a little more complicated than it may otherwise have been.

44. Following her birth, my now longstanding partner and I married as I felt that it was important for our daughters to bear his surname, especially as the elder of these two was then preparing to start her schooling. We lived a very happy, family-centric life with the children growing up in a welcoming, loving and safe environment.

45. In the latter years of his life, my second husband experienced a lot of unpleasant health issues, including several types of cancer one of which necessitated him having a Stoma.

46. I cannot help but feel that my husband was treated like a laboratory guinea pig. However, I also believe, in part due to a late-diagnosis, that without intervention he would not have survived for as long as he did, but I mention this now, only in order to provide as full and frank an account as possible, rather than specifically as regards issues directly related to 'infected blood.'

47. Sadly my husband passed away in GRO-B 2014, a result of Necrotising Facilitis which following surgery six days earlier, led to pneumonia and a heart attack.

48. I did not know that I had been given contaminated blood until September, 2019.

49. By August 2019 , I had been struggling for many years with tiredness and fatigue, often finding myself overwhelmingly exhausted, but all for no apparent reason. This tiredness came and went in waves, and on some occasions was so bad that I was compelled to take to my bed, exhausted, for an hour or two at a time, unable to do anything else. I found this really difficult, especially around my work, sometimes overwhelmingly so, but I nevertheless had to work.

50. Work and family life had by then both become quite difficult to negotiate and something had to be done. I initially sought the help of my GP, visiting the surgery several times to seek help for lethargy and fatigue, and found myself being checked for Anaemia, or offered Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), but to me it was clear that my condition was more than just an age-related issue.

51. I also suffered other symptoms of what I now know to have been Hepatitis C, also known as Hep' C and / or HcV, but which I did not know, as it had not been diagnosed, as having been HcV at that time. One of the most damaging, for me, was a recurrent 'brain fog,' something which I have to this day and which I only wish I had known of at the time, such has been its impact upon me.

52. I frequently felt nauseous, and could sit up in bed feeling dizzy and as if I was about to vomit. I found that I would have to take to my bed to lay down, to try to calm the dizziness I experienced with the feeling of nausea, but also needed to find the motivation for getting up, as I was also very lethargic.

53. I suffered mood swings, feeling quite content one moment only to become depressed, with absolutely no cause, shortly afterwards. I'm generally a very positive person, optimistic, cheery, so these mood swings and in particular depression was quite out of character for me.

54. All the same, I didn't do much about this, didn't feel ready to share my problems with others, and often wrote off what may have been happening as my being menopausal as I didn't think that there was much anyone could do, I was just getting older, the menopause was part of getting older, so I simply tried to cope as best as I could, alone.

55. I was left to believe that the GP believed all of my problems to have been related to the menopause, something which I went along with (in the absence of anything else which may have been credible), and attributed my issues to being menopause related and as such, hormone related.

56. As for the recurring incidents of my feeling nauseous, as I had always suffered from some nausea whilst pregnant, I had rather got used to these feelings and so I simply tried to cope with it as best as I could, as I always had before.

57. My now late husband had been unwell at this time, so it was not at all helpful in terms of our family for me to go downhill as well, so I tried to carry on as normal. My husband, who was then undergoing Chemotherapy, was seeing a herbalist and I accompanied him. Ostensibly, we were seeking some assistance for my husband, but I began using the herbalist myself, trying to address some of the issues I was facing and which appeared to be getting worse as time went by.

58. The herbalist provided me with treatment for my Adrenal Glands and other things, and I believe that whereas it may not have directly helped me, the placebo effect positively contributed to my overall physical and general well- being – I felt better myself, even if I wasn't.

59. Through my GP I submitted to various blood tests, and I can recall having returned high liver function test (LFT) results, high but apparently also fluctuating. At one point in time, a locum GP implied that I was an alcoholic, based entirely on the LFT results – he told me to 'ease up' on the drinking or my driving licence would be taken away!

60. His comments really shocked me as I had never been much of a drinker and certainly was not what one would consider to have been a problem drinker or alcoholic. His warnings served to make me anxious around alcohol and made me cut down on what little drinking I did do, to a point where I could barely have a single glass of wine without worrying about the consequences – health-wise and in terms of any intervention the authorities may deem necessary.

61. The comments of the locum were so impactive that I made an appointment to see my own GP in order to discuss them. My doctor then took steps to reassure me, and in so doing told me that the locum had, *"got the wrong end of the stick"* when he had spoken to me, and that *"whatever was causing my blood test results to be 'high,' was not alcohol related."*

62. On 23rd September, 2019 I visited my dental hygienist who having given me an injection into the gum, accidentally pricked her finger on the needle. As a result, I was asked to submit to a blood test. I was a little confused at the time, not understanding *why* this had been necessary, but not wanting to cause any unnecessary worry, I went for a test.

63. The blood test was conducted at the local hospital, and a few days later I received a call from the hospital asking me to return for further tests, which I did. It was following this second round of tests, presumably conducted to confirm the results of the first, that I was told that I had Hepatitis C.

64. The news came as a complete shock to me – I was both shocked and confused, *how had I got this infection?* I didn't understand how I had caught Hep' C, how it could have happened as I had never had any tattoos (be they self-inflicted or otherwise), no body piercings of any kind, and hadn't used intravenous drugs. Nor had I been sexually promiscuous or engaged in any other activities which may have placed me at risk of HcV infection, it made no sense.

65. I subsequently discovered that my doctors had been checking on my liver function, through my GP, for some twelve years leading up to this diagnosis. Although I had been wholly unaware of this throughout.

66. A Consultant at Dorchester told me that he believed that I had been given Hepatitis C many years before, and that at some stage Hep' C had been diagnosed, leading to the LFT's having been conducted over such a protracted period.

67. I do not know *how* it had become apparent that I had HcV, or when this had first been known, and Dr GRO-B could shed no light on this, but I now know that 'lookback' exercises were undertaken to identify those who may have been contaminated – I just don't know if I was one of those.

68. It was Dr GRO-B my GP, who confirmed my having HcV through the second round of tests, telling me that I had been *the first* to have been identified as having Hepatitis C by the surgery, but in so saying strongly hinting at the fact that there may well have been others yet to be identified. His views have subsequently been supported by those of my current GP.

69. Making use of a regularly circulated newsletter, my GP's surgery have recently advised their patients, that anyone who believes they may have undiagnosed Hepatitis can come forward and be tested.

70. I was then placed in the care of a Clinical Nurse Specialist, and over and above what she was able to tell me of the ailment, took steps to fully research Hepatitis C myself. My nurse has also stated that a blood transfusion was the most likely cause of my Hepatitis C.

Section Three - Other Infections

71. I do not believe that I have been infected with anything other than Hepatitis C as a result of my having been given contaminated blood by the National Health Service (NHS), but as I didn't know that I had HcV, and hadn't been told that I had HcV for many years, I do not feel that I can make this statement with any degree of certainty.

72. Not only was I unaware that I had Hep' C, but I was equally unaware of my liver function having been monitored, especially over such a protracted period. Where I say that I do not know if I have been infected with anything else, equally I do not know if I have been tested for anything else – I have never been told.

Section Four - Consent

73. With the passage of time, and perhaps more significantly an element of 'brain fog,' I cannot now remember too much of the earlier surgical procedures I underwent, other than the fact that on each occasion I found myself suffering a lot of pain.

74. I can recall the stigma associated with terminations, as I experienced it from certain NHS staff, let alone in the broader community around me, and am aware of the controversy this issue retains to this day, but again mention this only for the fullness of my disclosure.

75. Following the termination I remained a hospital inpatient for some seven to eight days before being discharged, something which is perhaps also indicative of the serious nature of the surgery I underwent, as opposed to a 'normal' termination conducted by other, less invasive means, and which may also point towards my having been given a blood transfusion.

76. The second episode of surgery also saw me being kept in for longer than had initially been anticipated, some eight to perhaps ten days in all, due to the complications the surgeon encountered whilst I had been in theatre and his having had to 'delve deeper' to remove tissue than had been expected and the fact that I was feeling very unwell.

77. NOT RELEVANT I know for a fact that I was given a blood transfusion as I can clearly remember it having been delivered by drip into one of my arms whilst I had been confined to bed. There were other ladies with them, as I have explained earlier, and we spoke and compared our respective experiences, the only difference between us being that they were able to mobilise whereas I had to stay in bed.

78. I have also been asked to submit to blood tests without knowing what my blood was being tested for, and have been tested (e.g. the LFT's over a twelve-year period) without my knowledge or consent.

Section Five - Treatment / Care / Support

79. I was only diagnosed as having Hepatitis C in September, 2019 , following which I was immediately placed in the care of a clinical nurse specialist and liver consultant for treatment.

80. As such, I cannot comment upon the level of care I may or may not have received had this virus been identified sooner – what alarms me is the fact that I had it for so long, unknown by me and unnoticed by my GP's, despite what I consider to have been declining health – issues initially attributed to being no more than those which may have been expected with ageing and / or the menopause.

81. I went through the menopause, but still had the same symptoms, so they could not have been directly menopause related, but I rarely went to my GP with them, and when I did was never given any explanation as to *why* I may have felt the way I did. With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps the mistake which was made at the time, had been to look at each symptom separately rather than as a whole, as had that taken place an earlier diagnosis may have ensued.

82. I cannot help but believe that there were a number of missed opportunities for HcV to have been diagnosed – LFT's were being conducted, for reasons which I was unaware of, and over a protracted period, so there must have been a reason *why* these were being performed.

83. The LFT's returned abnormal results, so they should have been regarded as indicators of hepatitis infection, but do not appear to have been, unless it was already known that I had Hep' C, and my LFT's were being monitored to ascertain its impact, but without my being told. All the same, I have recently learned, from, a medical professional, that even had HcV been found, I may have been treated any earlier on account of the costs involved, but I do not know if this true or not.

Section Six - Impact

84. Having apparently been infected with Hepatitis C since the 1970's but not diagnosed as having it until 2019 , I had been wholly unaware of the infection for over forty years.

85. As a result, the virus had been gathering strength within me, and at the very least impacting upon my liver, but all the time remaining unknown to me. Not knowing that I had hepatitis meant that it never entered my mind when other ailments, aches, pains or tiredness were encountered, and treating each as they arose as 'one off' illnesses or episodes, I dealt with each as best as I could at the time.

86. I am a great believer in mindfulness, which I have used to good effect and believe to have been key to my having been able to cope with declining health and / or recurrent issues such as my tiredness, ~~and~~ general lethargy and brain-fog throughout what has been a most trying time.

87. Fortunately, I have taken courses in mindfulness and am a trained counsellor, so I may have been better placed than others to address the various issues I have faced, and it also made my coming to terms with the diagnosis, when eventually delivered, a little easier than may otherwise have been the case.

88. The main impact of HcV, for me, has been declining health leading into the diagnosis, which I experienced over many years and how that struck me financially with a knock-on from both on my ability to live life as I would otherwise have wished to.

89. As I didn't know that I had Hep' C, I had no cause to worry about it, so my mental health was not adversely impacted by the knowledge of my having HcV. Equally, as it was unknown, I hadn't experienced any issues of 'stigma' related to the condition, and had not found myself being treated any differently to anyone else as regards my access to medical treatment, dentistry, financial services or the like.

Section Seven - Financial Considerations

90. Until a few years ago, I had been undertaking no less than three separate jobs. I enjoyed working, liked my work, and had a busy lifestyle which it funded.

91. I enjoyed a relatively comfortable lifestyle and was able to help my children as and when they may have needed it, in terms of financial support or childcare, the usual things a parent in a good position can do to support their children. However, as my health began to deteriorate, I found myself having to reduce what I was able to do, starting with my employment, slowly dropping one job after another as my tiredness, lethargy and general ill health became worse.

92. Hepatitis C infection took away the jobs I loved, and with them the lifestyle I enjoyed and support I provided to my family. Prior to my diagnosis, I was used to looking after my grandchildren at least once a week, as at the time they had been too young to attend school. For them, Thursdays was 'Grandma Day,' and I always relished the opportunities I had to spend some time with them.

93. However, having been diagnosed with hepatitis C, and through the consultant and specialist nurse undertaking treatment for the same, I cannot look after them unassisted and was struggling to do so beforehand as I had so many aches and pains and became so tired. I've 'missed out,' and so have they.

94. Having been diagnosed with Hepatitis C, and the infection having been attributed to a blood transfusion given between 1972 and 1974 it was apparent that my two younger daughters having been born later may also have become infected, through me.

95. This knowledge made me feel awful, a sort of guilt at what I may have done to them, albeit unwittingly and certainly not having been my fault. They had to submit to a test a well, something which they were quite wary of were really worried about the outcome. We prayed that their results would be negative so they would not have to go through the things I have experienced and the HcV treatment undertaken.

96. I have submitted an application for financial support, but this was rejected as a result of my not having been able to provide any supportive medical evidence, such as extracts from my medical notes from the hospital, which confirmed that I had received a blood transfusion.

97. I have applied for copies of my hospital medical notes, and have received some, but they are incomplete and significantly do not date back to the relevant time, i.e. the 1970's, which have been disposed of.

98. At that time I had been under the care of a GP (Dr GRO-B from a group practise in GRO-B Dorset (GRO-B which no longer exists. As a consequence I can source no notes from either my GP at the time or from the hospital from that time.

99. I feel that it is grossly unfair for people who have been infected through no fault of their own to be barred from financial support / compensation, especially as the NHS were the body responsible for the infection in the first place, but they are also the organisation responsible for the records of their actions, which in my case and no doubt that of many others, have been destroyed.

Section Eight - Other

100. When I look back over my life, I feel sad and wonder just how different my life may have been had it not been for the infection and the health problems it posed.

101. Although the physically debilitating symptoms of tiredness, dizziness, aching joints, nausea and the like were difficult, I have found that the brain-fog I have experienced has probably been the most upsetting and impactive upon me.

102. I struggle to retain information; to follow the story in a book or film, what happened yesterday, all manner of things. I was recently speaking to a friend, someone who's known me for over forty-five years about it, and she simply told me that it (i.e. brain-fog) was one of my most endearing characteristics, it was a trait that drew people to me.

103. I hadn't really appreciated that other people had noticed, but I had known that I had suffered with it for many years, especially remembering things which often made me feel silly, or embarrassed in company, but I had thought that I'd been able to mask it, keep it to myself. My children would often get cross with me, telling me that *"I told you that,"* or something of that nature, but I could simply not recall.

104. As a result, I have maintained a paper diary for many years, and write everything down so as to have a point of reference I can return to rather than rely on a failing memory, but now that my children know, it's made life a little easier, or at least watered down the feelings I have around them and them around me.

105. I had trained as a furniture designer and maker, with my tutors always telling me to 'measure twice, cut once,' and although I passed all of the necessary examinations, it wasn't as trade that worked for me as I was always making simple mistakes.

106. As a direct result, I changed careers and went to university to train as a counsellor. Once again I managed to qualify, but I always knew that I was weaker as regards theory than my peers when I shouldn't have been. Other people could retain information, so why couldn't I, it was both worrying and frustrating in equal measure.

107. My supervisor suggested that I undertake further training, even go on to take a Masters Degree, and I would have dearly loved to have done so, but I also understood that mentally I could not manage any additional academic undertakings, research and so on, although I would have really liked to have furthered my understanding, especially as regards the challenges impacting upon the mental health of young people.

108. Another issue with the brain-fog I experience has been its impact for me as I have tried to learn French. I have tried to learn this language on no fewer than three separate occasions, going to night-school, and using time which became available due to the lockdown, studying hard but always to no avail as I struggle to retain information.

109. At least now, now that I know *why* brain fog has been a problem for me, it is easier to understand and come to terms with, it all makes sense now, but my life could and in my view should have been so very different had it not been for this particular symptom of Hepatitis C.

110. Having received HcV treatment, I now find that I have more energy, rarely experience feelings of nausea, but still have joint pain and occasional dizziness, but whereas things appear to be 'on the mend' in these respects, the brain fog remains and has not improved at all.

111. I provide this statement in the hope that the Infected Blood Inquiry can support those like me who have been wrongfully infected. Although during my lifetime I have experienced a number of tarnishing experiences with the NHS, especially as regards my late husband's treatment which I have briefly mentioned, I also recognise how supportive and kind NHS personnel have been to me, especially following my HcV diagnosis.

112. I would like to think that the work of the Inquiry would serve to improve the service provided by the NHS whilst removing the likelihood of anything of this nature being repeated, but for that to happen there must also be an acknowledgement of the adverse issues within the healthcare system and poor practises of GP's and steps taken to address them.

113. It is a sad fact that the hard work of many devoted, caring NHS employees can be overshadowed by the poor practise of others and failing systems which are, or have been, in place.

114. I would like to point out that my current GP's surgery, in light of what has happened to me, invited any of their patients who believes that they may have Hepatitis C, to come forward for testing in what I believe to be a quite innovative, possibly unique initiative which is only to be complemented.

115. As previously stated, I made efforts to secure copies of my medical notes, but in doing so found that there was a seven year gap in the information held, this period covering that in which I had both the clinical termination by way of a Caesarian form of intervention and the endometrial tissue removal operation. This was the position with my GP's practises, albeit that one of the surgeries I had used had closed.

116. The hospital records did not extend far enough back either, although within my existing gynaecological notes there were brief references to my past medical history, albeit not distinctly referring to a blood transfusion, just the procedures in a limited fashion.

117. I therefore have no means of providing any form of written supportive evidence in support of any claim for financial aid / compensation, but I do have the support of my current liver specialist, my GP and the clinical nurse specialist through whom I have received HcV treatment, all of whom are of the opinion that I became infected by virtue of a transfusion of contaminated blood, possibly two, delivered at the GRO-B in the 1970's, as I have not exposed myself to any other risk factors.

118. In order to better assist the Infected Blood Inquiry with their understanding of my statement, I would now like to produce the following items as documentary exhibits:-

WITN3924002

119. A copy (three pages) of the Summer 2022 Newsletter produced by my current GP's group practise, GRO-B which shows (page one, on the lower half of the page) their initiative to screen patients for the blood borne virus Hepatitis C.

120. Interestingly, in light of my infection having passed undetected over such a long period, the author writes that, *" ... left undiscovered it can cause liver damage. Many are not aware they have Hep C until it is too late."*

121. This article goes on to state that a patient may be at risk of Hepatitis C infection if, *"... you have ever injected or snorted drugs, had a tattoo or piercing using unsterile equipment, had medical, dental or cosmetic procedures (including vaccination) using unsterilised equipment, spent significant time in South Asia or received a blood transfusion before 1992 ..."*

WITN3942003

122. I have previously mentioned that I tried to secure copies of my medical notes through both my current and former GP's practises and hospital, and that I experienced problems in doing so as one of my former GP surgeries had closed as had one of the hospitals I had been treated in, and in particular no records remained for the period 15/02/1968 to 14/02/10977, a period which encompassed both of the incidents of surgery to which I have referred.

123. This can be seen on a yellow 'Post-It Note' attached to one of the record sheets I received, upon which whomsoever had sourced the note had marked this fact down. I now produce a copy of this record, with the note attached.

WITN3924004

124. A copy of a letter, dated 20th February, 2020 from Linda Thompson of the Dorset County Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust, Health Records Department (Dorchester) with which she provided me with copies of the material held, albeit incomplete and as can be seen from her letter, some of which, having been transferred to microfiche, was of poor quality – which in fact, in parts, I found to be illegible.

125. Even had the record been complete, its poor quality may well have meant that its content was effectively meaningless. Far more care needed to be taken when copying the paper record onto microfiche, or the modernising of this record keeping process, as I found, was a pointless exercise.

WITN3924005

126. A letter of Clinical Nurse Specialist, Jenna Wooding (Dorset County Hospital) to my GP's Surgery updating them as regards my HcV diagnosis and treatment plan.

WITN3924006

127. A letter dated 22nd January, 2020 from the Hepatitis C Clinic of Dr James Jupp (Gastroenterology Department, Dorset County Hospital) to my GP (Dr GRO-B to appraise my surgery of the HcV Treatment I was then receiving, its progress and monitoring, and plans for future review.

128. The letter shows that I was treated (later found to have been successful) with Zepatier over a protracted period, and that I suffered with the side effects I have described within the body of this statement.

129. Using this letter, the clinician informed my GP that given time, post Hep' C treatment, the side-effects and symptoms I was then presenting with, would diminish, something which he had sought to reassure me over – sadly, particularly as regards the brain-fog I experienced and have to this day, that has not been the case, but I am a lot less fatigued than I had been.

Statement Of Truth

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

Signed: GRO-B

Dated: 24th August 2022