ANONYMOUS
Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No: WITN4783001
Exhibits: **Nil**
Dated: 20/02/23.

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 11 October 2022.

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B My date of birth is GRO-B 1969. I live with my partner, two dogs and two cats in GRO-B and my full address is known to the Inquiry. I am a self-employed digital consultant.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with HCV. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me, my family and our lives together.

3. I confirm that I have not chosen to have legal representation and that I am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement. I also confirm that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity

process to me. I wish to be anonymous because I have noticed that everything goes online and I worry that people, who are not sympathetic to the situation, could find my statement on Google. I appreciate that the Inquiry is trying to create a bigger picture and is trying to get to the bottom of what has happened, but there is still a lot of stigma and there is no certainty of what's to come.

4. Initially I was apprehensive about giving a statement to the Infected Blood Inquiry, but I began to feel guilty for not doing so. I want to support the work of the Inquiry and those infected and affected. I didn't think it was fair that other people voluntarily put themselves through this process and I didn't. I am not emotionally expressive and this experience has opened up a lot of scars that will last for a while.

5. 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.

6. 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. However, these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates.

Section 2. How Infected

7. When I was about nineteen years old, in 1990, I was attacked and stabbed out of the blue in Blackpool. I was taken by ambulance to Blackpool Victoria Hospital and the clinicians had to use a hand-drill to drill into my side to drain the blood from my lungs. As I had lost a lot of blood, I required a large blood transfusion. Before the transfusion was administered there were no warnings about the risks of being exposed to HCV or any other infection. I am unsure about how many units were

needed, but I was very lucky not to die. I was in hospital for a couple of weeks whilst I was recovering.

8. During the twenty years leading up to my HCV diagnosis, I had severe brain fog and could not maintain any level of concentration, but I had always put it down to having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which at the time I had not been diagnosed with ADHD and I was unaware that I had this condition. I was not very good at concentrating on things and I would have short bursts of attention span. Apart from this, I did not have any further symptoms that could have been linked to HCV at the time. I have always had joints in my adult life with my joints but now looking back retrospectively something the problems I thought were with my arthritis now I attribute it to my HCV, having spoken to people with HCV.

9. In around 2010, twenty years later, when I was around forty years old, my ex-partner and I were having difficulties in trying for a baby, so we decided to go down the IVF route. We were under the care of GRO-B GRO-B Hospital where they ran several tests prior to starting IVF treatment. As a result of these tests, the clinicians discovered that I had HCV, but rather than telling me, they told my GP at GRO-B

10. I received a phone call from my GP surgery and I was called in for an appointment. I was not aware that I was about to be told that I had HCV and the appointment could have been for anything as far as I was concerned. It was all such a shock when I went to see the GP and was told that I had HCV, and I feel as though I was completely blindsided. I went to the surgery on my own and if I had known that I was going to be told something so serious, I would have brought someone with me to support me through the appointment.

11. I had no idea what HCV was and I was not provided with adequate information to understand and manage the infection. I was not given advice about potentially infecting others, such as through cutting myself.

I don't know how, but I must have established that I wasn't a risk to other people, unless I was bleeding. It is possible that I may have done my own research on google to find out more about the condition but I am unable to recall exactly.

12. The clinicians may have said something about passing on HCV during sex, but I cannot be certain. However, due to the breakdown of my relationship with my ex-partner, caused by my infection with HCV, detailed later, the last thing we were having was a sexual relationship.

13. It seemed as though the GP was uncomfortable telling me about the HCV and it seemed like she did not want to have to be the person to do that. It was mind-blowing news. I had no idea that I had HCV and naturally I was extremely shocked. I was not told about the next steps in detail, but I think my GP may have told me she was referring me to the Hepatology Department, at Manchester Royal Information (MRI). My impression was that I had got something similar to AIDS and I was left alone without any support or help. There was also no explanation whatsoever of how I could have contracted HCV, so I was left wondering how I could have been infected. This was the last time I saw this particular doctor as she was awful and one of the reasons that I moved to a different GP practice. I am unable to recall her name.

14. I think that it was a few weeks later that I was referred to the hepatology unit at Manchester Royal Infirmary, where I saw a hepatology specialist. The consultant asked me a number of different questions about my lifestyle choices, including whether I had been a drug user or ever had a blood transfusion. I have never had any tattoos, piercings, nor taken any drugs, my only vice is the odd beer. The consultant said that there was a high probability I would have got my HCV from the blood transfusion which I was given after being stabbed. I am unable to recall the consultants name, overall Manchester Royal Infirmary clinicians were helpful.

Section 3. Other Infections

15. I don't believe I received any infection other than HCV as a result of being given infected blood. I would have been tested for HIV and other diseases, when I was going through the tests before starting the IVF treatment.

16. I think that it is likely that I would have been tested for other infections following my HCV diagnosis, but I cannot be certain.

Section 4. Consent

17. When was I stabbed it was an emergency situation so there were no questions about consent, before being given the blood transfusion. However, I was conscious and there was no mention of consent.

18. When I attended GRO-B Hospital for the IVF treatment, I was not told that the clinicians would be testing me for HCV. I do not recall the clinicians ever specifically saying what exactly they would be testing for, and initially I didn't know why the clinicians were taking blood. You just accept whatever tests the clinicians have to do, as a part of the IVF process.

Section 5. Impact

19. Holistically it is a difficult situation as I know I would have died if I had not had a blood transfusion. Despite this, the physical and mental effects of HCV have been extremely severe, so it is hard to look at the situation objectively.

20. One of the key impacts of HCV has been memory issues, such as struggling with names, and brain fog, which I have experienced

throughout most of my adult life. As stated previously, at times I thought I had ADHD and just assumed that I was not very good at concentrating. After my HCV diagnosis, I now expect that an element of my memory issues and brain fog, resulted from the HCV infection.

21. As a result of HCV, I get pain in my wrists, ankles and back; my joints are all very painful and I am always going over on my ankles. Other than cycling, I have never played any strenuous sports like football or rugby, so it is unlikely that there would be any real wear or tear to my knees, other than what would have beencaused by my HCV infection. I feel I can sleep for England and I always feel very lethargic and fatigued all of the time.

22. A strange side-effect which I also attribute to HCV is that I used to get weird yellowish staining on my pillows from sweat, but since I was cured this does not happen anymore. I cannot be certain but I feel that may have been some sort of symptom of the HCV and connected in some way.

23. *In terms of treatment, I didn't have the treatment straight away* as I was worried about its impact. The clinicians at Manchester Royal Infirmary had warned me about the psychological side-effects of the treatment and as I was also dealing with the breakdown of my relationship with my ex-partner, I did not think that it would be a good idea. If I had gone through treatment straight away, I felt that it would have had a detrimental effect on my mental health.

24. I underwent the treatment about a year after discovering that I had been infected with HCV. I went back to Manchester Royal Infirmary for some tests where I saw the specialist consultant at the hospital. I was told that the chances of having a successful outcome on the treatment were higher, because my blood tests showed that the HCV viral load was average.

25. Initially, the nurses were worrying me a great deal because they said that I had to lose weight before commencing the treatment, because if I didn't lose weight then the treatment may not work. However, the consultant told me not to worry and that worrying too much about losing weight would make me more stressed and he pointed out that that I naturally had a big frame in terms of height and weight. I did in fact lose a lot of weight due to stress, reduced appetite and abstinence from alcohol.

26. My treatment consisted of Interferon and Ribavirin. I had to inject the Interferon into my stomach everyday which was particularly difficult. The Ribavirin was in the form of oral daily tablets.

27. In a way, I knew what to expect as I understood the way in which the treatment works; you are bringing your immune system down to allow the antivirals to work, because otherwise your immune system would attack the antivirals.

28. During the treatment, I would have no energy whatsoever, but I still had to carry on working. I was lethargic and could not think straight, and felt stressed and frightened. You are physically and mentally fatigued and you can't think about anything, because all you are thinking about is the treatment. I just stayed in bed a lot. I already had pre-existing skin problems but they were exacerbated by the treatment and I developed psoriasis.

29. Cycling was a salvation for me as I became incredibly depressed. I tried to shut most things out of my mind during the treatment by cycling which took my mind off things. I also experienced severe anxiety as a result of HCV and the treatment, but I never spoke about it with anyone. Every day I would be thinking about what the next problem could be. I had no certainties about what came next and I was left with no hope whatsoever.

30. I had to force myself to work whilst on the treatment. As I was self-employed, it was easier to be more flexible, but still it was really hard. Whilst there was no consequence of me getting into trouble with a manager at work, reputationally it can be damaging. I did not earn enough money throughout the treatment. Socially, it was difficult.

31. The consultant and nurses at Manchester Royal Infirmary were extremely supportive, but it seemed that their job was to just cure me, rather than providing me with wider knowledge and support. Perhaps I should have pushed a bit more to understand what was going on, but it was all so traumatic, you kind of put it all to the back of your mind. I was just focusing on the treatment and not the knock-on effect of everything it caused.

32. I went in to Manchester Royal Infirmary weekly to pick up a new supply of my medication and for a quick check-up. In terms of support, I don't think there was any sort of support phone line available that I could use. However, in all honesty, at that point I would not have phoned anyone anyway, because I would have tried to deal with it all myself.

33. There was never any judgement from the specialist consultant. I think I received more sympathy due to the circumstances in which I was infected, rather than bringing the infection on myself. However, I don't think that it should matter either way in terms of any stigma and how you are treated. During the treatment you were lumped in with drug takers but that was the reality of the situation.

34. After all of this, thankfully, the treatment was successful the first time. The two nurses at the unit were brilliant and they both were dead chuffed when the HCV was cleared.

35. The clinicians at Manchester Royal Infirmary did a scan on my liver and maybe also some biopsies, although I am unable to recall

precisely. The condition of my liver was not perfect but it also did not give cause for concern, as there was no cirrhosis.

36. However, there was no follow up monitoring or tests, or any sort of aftercare following the treatment. I worry as I was told that the virus was undetectable but, that it could come back one day, so I have to be proactive and specifically ask for tests to get myself checked regularly. I have asked my GP a couple of times to do the HCV test and then do other tests to check the condition of my liver. These requests are generally met. However, I am going to start asking for an annual check-up.

37. There should be an annual check for people like me and I should not have to ask. It should just be offered as a matter of course by the hepatology departments after treatment. Luckily, I am being proactive but not everyone may have it in them to ask for such tests.

Impact:

38. When I was told by my GP that I had HCV, I went straight to my then partner to tell her. I would not have told my ex-partner over the phone so I went home to have the conversation. The immediate reaction was awful and it descended into an argument. At that stage, I didn't know how I had contracted it. I had no support from her and as far as she was concerned, I had AIDS. As I am not an expert in these things, I also thought I had AIDS.

39. All my ex-partner was worried about was being infected. I expected, naively so, more support and for her to be more concerned. My ex-partner was only really concerned about herself. I didn't think the HCV would have an impact on our relationship but it did, significantly so.

40. My ex-partner was horrified and the things she used to call me were awful. She completely changed from the person she was and she chose to blame me, despite knowing it was not my fault.

41. I appreciate that it was not great for my ex-partner, but the clinicians at GRO-B Hospital were really supportive. They gave us two options on how to proceed, with regards to the IVF treatment, after finding out I had HCV. One of the options was to wash the sperm and the other was to use a sperm donor.

42. I cannot say for sure but I think my ex-partner wanted to go ahead with the donor option, because at that point in her head she had already decided that we would not be continuing our relationship. Despite this, she still wanted a baby and needed financial support in the process.

43. In her mind, if we had used a donor, then whilst the baby would not be biologically mine, I would still have paid for everything the baby needed. In my opinion, my ex-partner wanted me to financially support the process and look after her until she wouldn't need me at some point.

44. As a consequence of finding out I was infected with HCV, the relationship with my ex-partner quickly broke down. In hindsight, this was probably for the best, as if the news of the HCV infection is the reason that the relationship would break down then it probably is not worth it in the first place. It was like the tide going out, and I saw all the shells and everything that was bad with the relationship.

45. We had a house together and I had to leave our home. My wife bought my share of the house. The only thing I took was a sofa and a television. So, I didn't have a home and I had to rent as I did not have enough money to buy a house. So, I was back to stage one. To complicate this further, I had to find somewhere to rent with three dogs.

46. Thankfully, I was quite lucky as my mate GRO-B knew someone in the village who had a farm with places to let, so I had somewhere to live. The owner also let me build a dog run for my dogs.

47. If I had stayed in the house that I owned with my ex-partner then I would have a lot more money now. The financial impacts were huge as a result of all of this.

48. However, with hindsight I consider that it was all a blessing in disguise for me and the baby, because my ex-partner turned out to be a different person from what I initially thought.

49. I did really want children but my new partner whom I am with now, did not, but I guess you can't choose who you fall in love with and instead we have two dogs and two cats to look after.

50. Sometimes I do however think about the fact that if it had not been for finding out that I had HCV, I would have gone through with the IVF and had children. I have never spoken about the knock-on effect of not having children.

51. The diagnosis was a defining moment and I think the biggest impact on my life has been not having had children. I know that the HCV had a huge impact at that moment in time, as that was what we were going to do with the IVF treatment and the HCV diagnosis changed the whole course of my life from that point onwards. I was looking forward to having children at that point in my life and it just completely kyboshed it. The reality is that I know that the HCV categorically changed my life at that moment, from looking forward to having children, to not having children. If I had children my life would have been completely different and I try not to dwell on it, but it is something I think about from time to time. When I have looked after friends' children and they comment that I would make a really good dad, that brings it home.

52. When the relationship with my ex-partner broke down it was all a bit strange as we had the same friendship circle, but everyone pretty much stayed friends with me instead of her. Looking back, I think maybe they were more aware of how my ex-partner was than me, or perhaps they were not happy with how she treated me following my

diagnosis. My close friends have always been very supportive despite the fact that my ex-partner had gone around telling people that I had AIDS.

53. One thing I do worry about, in light of how poorly my ex-partner treated me, is that she will attempt to get some money in the future. I guess she has been impacted in a way. It is all difficult to reconcile how badly my ex-partner treated me, with all of this. If I had not been in a relationship with my ex-partner, then I would not have gone through IVF and may not have found out about my HCV until much later. It is kind of like a double-edged sword.

54. When I discovered I had HCV, there would have been a brief period of time where I came to terms with what had happened and I would have tried to establish in my own mind whether I was safe to be around people. I was never warned about not telling people about my infection in terms of stigma, but I only told close friends and family. It is an awful thing which you have to think about yourself, as to who to tell and you are not thinking straight at the time. It was a difficult traumatic period.

55. I do not tend to go around talking about my infection with HCV too much, but I wouldn't say that I hide it either. I feel I cannot be ashamed for something that has happened to me which was not my fault.

56. My current partner and I have been together for eleven years, and we currently live in my partner's house. We will be together until we die. We were mutual friends before we got together, so she knew about the situation and how it all evolved. By the time I had undertaken the treatment, we were an item and GRO-B was extremely supportive throughout the whole ordeal. She was always extremely supportive.

57. Despite GRO-B tremendous support, there must have been an impact on her. It is hard to verbalise how she would feel as she has had to deal with the stress and anxiety of everything that happened. I feel I sometimes put her in an impossible situation, as when you love

someone you don't want them to suffer. It must be frustrating for her as whenever there is an issue, I am completely negative about it and she will try to reassure me. If we had met under different circumstances, it may have been very different. After I had my knee operation GRO-B looked after me and that was really hard for both of us.

58. All in all, I have found the online Infected Blood Support Groups to be really helpful. I am a member of a support group on Facebook and the group always get animated when something happens news-wise. There have been a lot of posts since the interim payment announcement. GRO-B has been exceptionally brilliant and I have been to many video conferences where GRO-B has been present. I also have had a few interactions with the Hepatitis C Trust who were really good.

59. It is good to hear from different people who have been affected and you find out more about what is going on, via the support groups, rather than anything else. It brings together a lot of people who have been impacted and provides a support network.

60. From looking at these groups, I often notice people describe similar symptoms as I am experiencing, such as issues with their legs. It frustrates me as it seems no one has done the research to join-up all the dots and make the connections between having HCV and its lasting effects. I explain my symptoms to doctors and they always tell me that it has nothing to do with HCV, despite them not being a specialist in HCV or knowing anything about it.

61. Whilst I was given leaflets about HCV there was never anyone who could explain to me the impacts of having HCV, and who knew exactly what I was going through. It would have been good to have someone around to say you are probably thinking about X, Y or Z, and you will probably experience these specific symptoms.

62. Clinicians would often understand what I was going through with regards to HCV and the treatment, however, nothing was ever done to help alleviate the wider symptoms I was experiencing. In my mind, whilst I was receiving treatment I was dealing with a specialist, but the wider medical profession doesn't understand, because they have no real knowledge of it. So, my frustration is when a GP tells me categorically something as fact, such as my knee issues not being linked to HCV, I know that they can't know, because nobody categorially knows, because the research hasn't been done, as the focus has been on trying to ignore what happened. There has been no follow up, I accept that there has been a push to get people cleared of HCV, but no one has actively said we need to figure out the wider implications, such as joint pain, because a lot of people talk about joint pain and brain fog. Therefore, I always feel like I have to challenge the medical professionals who I ask questions of, and it often transpires that the reason they don't know, is the reason they don't know! In my view, I do not feel GPs or any other medical professional should make an opinion about something they do not know about.

63. Despite trying her best, even my partner does not understand what is going on with me. Anxiety informs everything I do, bad or good. I continue to have health issues and worry so much about my health. When I found out I had HCV that was the catalyst for the anxiety and my hypervigilance about my general health. I find myself looking out for something that may not be there, but you can't help looking out for it nonetheless. It was never from this point just a sore knee or whatever, it was the feeling I was going to die. I will be worrying, thinking that I am going to die, up until the day I am going to die – constantly thinking the worst is going to happen. If I had received support from someone who knows what they are talking about it would have settled my nerves a lot. I am about to receive some counselling.

64. My entire life has been difficult as I did not have a very good childhood. When you don't have a good upbringing, you learn to shut

things out and become quite pragmatic about how to deal with things. It makes you feel resilient but it is false and does not help properly. My mother was very responsible for my poor upbringing and essentially gave up being my mother a long time before the HCV situation arose.

65. After all of this, I feel I have become a bit of a hypochondriac now. However, my GPs at GRO-B have never made me feel like I shouldn't go to see them about a problem. Whilst we have never openly spoken about the HCV, I know they appreciate that it is the reason why I become particularly worried about certain symptoms.

66. As soon as I get a cough or sore leg, I think it is the end and I am going to die. No amount of logic takes it away and you have always got the worst scenario in your mind. Every symptom I experience, I think is something to do with the HCV and every time I trace it back to HCV. I don't know whether this is my brain making it up.

67. I do try to tell myself that I haven't got anything wrong with me and to pull myself together. The brain does a good job of convincing you that anxiety is in your stomach not your head. I will visit my GP more times than most and often go to A&E, so I know I am not going to die. It is sometimes easier to just get the scan or whatever it is, done in A&E, rather than worrying about it and waiting for referrals. It is always there and I feel it now. I feel it all the time and my brain does a good job at suppressing it sometimes. You try to convince yourself that you are not anxious but it is a little loop you get into.

68. COVID-19 worsened my health anxiety as I was classed as a clinically vulnerable person. I don't feel as anxious now but I have reconciled myself with the logic that if I cannot survive after four jabs, then I probably shouldn't. I just know if I was to get COVID-19 then I probably would suffer badly from it.

69. My GP at GRO-B has always been great and ensured I was placed on the clinically vulnerable list during the

pandemic, which meant I received all the shielding advice and priority access to vaccines. However, I didn't feel like I deserved it.

70. Overall, there needs to be technical support for those infected, with someone who knows what they are talking about. I think in Ireland they have some sort of health pass and you see someone who knows about your health situation and has experience of what you are going through. There should be a dedicated route of support.

71. Ultimately the NHS was the cause so they should take on the burden. I do not feel there has been a lot of research conducted into the long-term effects of HCV and it just seems that clinicians don't know. I feel more research needs to be commissioned so people can have informed opinions about HCV.

72. It would be really helpful to speak to someone who actually knows about HCV. I have not really spoken to one person who has an expertise in HCV. I want to be able to understand the effects of HCV from a physical and mental health point of view.

73. On top of the health anxiety, the day-to-day anxieties are always difficult when something appears on the news. I try to be pragmatic about things but despite how pragmatic you are, anxiety often overrides it.

74. There was also a lot of stress leading up to these interim payments and it made me very anxious and uncertain. I remember initially reading the Sunday Times and there was some information about the payments. After this, there were lots of talks about an announcement but then there wasn't one until weeks later. There was also a change in Government going on, so it was uncertain whether the payments would still go ahead.

75. I kind of wished that it had not been brought up without a definite plan in place, as it always felt like you were in limbo with things. I remember

the news of the interim payments being announced at midnight and I saw something about it on a Facebook group for people infected and affected by the infected blood.

76. Even after the announcement from the Government that the payments were going to be made, it was also very stressful waiting for the letter to come, which I only got two days before receiving the money. It just added to the stress and anxiety of everything.

77. I really struggled as I have never really relied on anyone for anything, but with these payments, I feel they are necessary as I am self-employed and I don't have a pension.

78. As a result of HCV, I have had to make some difficult decisions regarding my career. Even now after treatment, I struggle with brain fog and concentration. I felt that I was unemployable because of the brain fog in particular, and being self-employed and there was no support structure or anyone to share my concerns with. However, I managed to work in a sales job in my twenties. It worked well for me because the type of job meant it required just burstsof energy. That is why I naturally went for that sort of job as I was not required to do any admin work or anything that would require long periods of concentration.

79. In light of my symptoms, I decided in my thirties that I should be self-employed as being self-employed meant I was responsible for myself and there was no one who could complain about my work. Although, I feel I have not had a secure career because of the brain fog and lethargy. When I compare myself to my friends who had very good jobs and good pension working for companies, I have never been able to afford to pay intoa pension in reality. Not having a good pension is just another anxiety I have about my later life. At least, thankfully, we get some financial assistance payment which kind of acts like a pension, although it is not huge but it suffices. I do not tend to spend a lot of money as I have to be careful, but I also don't have a mortgage.

80. Financially, I have never been denied a mortgage or insurance. I have life insurance and I have told them about my infection with HCV. I pay a higher premium because of my HCV but I have taken on the extra cost as I feel I need life insurance. Private health insurance also would cost me a lot more money and in fact, you have to pay more for any sort of insurance as you have to declare that you have had HCV. It has been a long time since I have travelled due to the pandemic, but I know it would be very expensive now for me to attempt to get travel insurance.

81. *All* of these little knock-on effects that accumulate have been traumatic. I will never fully know what the circumstances would have been if I had not had the blood transfusion. I would have lived a totally different life. If I hadn't had the blood transfusion, maybe I could have been a lawyer or a surgeon. I don't know what I could have done and I am never going to know. There is not a lot I can do about that and I just have to make my way the best that I can.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

82. The GP surgery who I was with when I found out that I had been infected with HCV, were not good in how they dealt with it, as previously mentioned. Following this I moved to the GRO-B GRO-B where they have been excellent throughout everything.

83. One of the factors that ran through my mind when recently thinking about whether to move house, was that I would not want to move from the doctors where I am currently a patient. I have heard many comments and stories about infected people getting zero help from their GP and I wouldn't want to be in a similar position.

84. *Overall*, the nurses and consultants at Manchester Royal Infirmary were very good. The only caveat to this would be the issues I

expressed previously about requiring specialist help throughout the rest of my life, so I can manage the long-term effects of having HCV.

85. In terms of other treatment, I have never been denied any sort of treatment or faced difficulties as a consequence of being infected with HCV. However, I was never told to inform dentists or any other medical professionals about my infection with HCV. So, I never told the dentist about it. In any case, I hate dentists so I don't normally go unless I absolutely need to, therefore there is a strong chance that once I had been diagnosed, that I didn't go to the dentist in the period that I had HCV.

86. I was never offered and counselling or psychological support as a result of being infected. In recent years, I have thought more about psychological help and counselling, and I feel that it would have helped me a lot. As a consequence of meeting the Inquiry Team to give my statement and also following a Hepatitis C Trust video meeting I am going for some psychological therapy which is supported financially by England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS). Although, EIBSS offer financial support this was not obviously available and I only found out about it as result of a combination of factors which led to me taking up the offer of financial support for counselling.

87. Despite fighting through everything and trying my best to protect my mental health, I have most definitely been impacted by all of this.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

88. I found out about the Skipton Fund from the clinicians at Manchester Royal Infirmary. I spoke to Skipton and I was sent a form in the post to complete. I had to apply for access to my medical records and I also had to get the clinicians to sign the form and they sent it on to Skipton.

89. Before applying to Skipton, I had already obtained access to my medical records from Blackpool Victoria Hospital, as I was trying to find proof that I had a blood transfusion for the hepatologist at the Manchester Royal Infirmary.

90. I think Blackpool Victoria Hospital was good at record retention as I have seen a lot of people getting their records from there easily. Therefore, applying to the Skipton Fund was easy for me because I had the medical records, so I was accepted straight away. I find it astounding that there are no medical records available for a lot of people, which I have heard about through the support groups.

91. I initially received a lump sum payment of £20,000 from Skipton. Then sometime later, out of the blue, I started receiving a monthly amount which was not a lot of money, but something around £4,000 a year. All of a sudden this changed when Skipton payments went over to EIBSS, when the schemes tried to ensure there was parity between the devolved nations, which meant we got another payment. I think it went up to £20,000 a year and a further £500 for heating allowance. There were no back-dated payments made from when the scheme was administered under Skipton.

92. The people at EIBSS are really good and really sympathetic. I have spoken to EIBSS on about eight different occasions and whenever I have spoken to them, they have always been professional. I did not have many dealings with Skipton and did not know much about them as there was no regular communication, other than an annual letter telling you what you would be receiving. I now have learnt through the support groups and listening to the Inquiry hearings, that the reality was that they didn't want people to be informed about what potential support was available.

93. Overall, the interim payment has been beneficial but I don't have steady work or a pension to rely on. However, in the grand scheme of

things and due to the current cost of living crisis, £100,000 is not that much money anymore. I am hoping that as it is an interim payment, that more money will be paid out to help compensate those infected and affected.

Section 8. Other Issues

94. Completing this statement is particularly significant. The day I met with the Inquiry Team to give my statement, is the day that interim payments were being made, so it is a stark reminder about all that I have gone through. The interim payment is good news and it brings some financial certainty for those infected.

95. As much as there should be, I don't think there will be any consequences or people held accountable, for what they have done. Despite this, right now lessons need to be learned to make sure it does not ever happen again. At the very least I hope those infected and affected feel like they have been listened to as a result of this public Inquiry.

96. I really hope one of the recommendations is that support is given to us all, for the rest of our lives. The impacts on my life and the lives of so many others, have been so great, there has to be this ongoing support.

97. I am strong in my view that there needs to be something within the NHS to support people who have been infected. Someone allocated to you who knows exactly what they are talking about, so not just focusing on the treatment but also about the aftercare.

98. One of my biggest concerns is about the people who may have been infected with HIV, HBV or HCV, but who do not know about it. The 'look-back' exercises were useful, however, it was only ever possible to contact people where they held a record of their blood transfusion. Although, that said, I was not contacted before, I discovered that I had

HCV during IVF treatment, despite Blackpool Victoria Hospital having a record of me having had a blood transfusion in the relevant period of time, where there was a risk of being infected.

99. A lot more effort should have been put into writing to everyone who could be at risk and inviting them to go and get tested. I think a lot of the messaging in the media is about people who know they have been infected, rather than trying to establish whether there are people out there who could have been exposed to the risk of infection.

100. In fairness, I think a lot of the Infected Blood Inquiry has been overshadowed by COVID-19. So, we have not heard about the Inquiry in the media as much as we should. I have only been involved in the current Inquiry as I had not been diagnosed with HCV before the commission of the previous Inquiries.

101. The impact it had on me has been awful but I can imagine how great the impact would be for children who had haemophilia and got AIDS. In any situation there are always people who have had it worse.

102. It is all a very sad state of affairs and I always thought no money can make up for what has happened but, in a way, one cannot deny that money can help. Although, you would not need the support had it not been for the infected blood, it is as though you are grateful for something that wasn't your fault.

103. I think financial support is one of the key ways that those infected and affected can be supported, but I also think, as stated above, there should be some sort of technical support from a health point of view.

104. It is all such a sad situation for so many people and I hope what comes out of the Inquiry for all of us, is that we get an opportunity to try and reconcile everything that has happened. It is very much similar to the Hillsborough disaster, a lot of information is already out there in the open

GRO-B