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Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN5544001

Exhibits:

Dated:

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 19 April 2021.

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B. My date of birth is GRO-B 1962 and I reside in Lancashire.
2. I was born in GRO-B and I have lived in the area my whole life. I was previously married and am now divorced. I have been with my current partner GRO-B for GRO-B years and whilst we are not married I have 3 daughters aged 35, 33 and 16. Our 16 year old daughter currently lives with us.

3. I contracted Hepatitis C from blood transfusions I received during an operation for injuries I sustained to my left hand after an accident when I was 15 years old.
4. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

Section 2. How Affected

5. When I was a young boy my mates and I would make our own fireworks. On one occasion we were making fireworks with sodium chlorate and sugar on a railway track when one exploded. I recall the date that this occurred was on or around 24 September 1978.
6. I was badly injured from the explosion. There was shrapnel stuck in my leg and some damage was caused to my left thigh. All of my hair was burnt off because of the impact and I lost sight in both of my eyes for 2 weeks. My eyesight fully returned after 2 weeks. I also sustained trauma to my left hand and it was therefore surgically amputated.
7. After the accident I was taken to Wigan Royal Infirmary where I was taken into emergency surgery and treated for around 3-4 weeks. I cannot recall the doctor whose care I was under.
8. I had many surgeries while I was in the hospital. My hand was gangrenous and kept bleeding, so the doctors had to keep amputating portions of the hand until they could get it down to where the healthy tissue was. They took a lot off to get to the healthy tissue. They removed the tissue right down to my wrist.
9. I was given blood transfusions during my surgeries. I was given about 2 or 2.5 pints of blood. As far as I am aware, the risk of infection from receiving blood products was not explained to me before I was given

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the transfusions. I would have been unconscious during the surgeries in any event.

10. I then had to wait around 12 months to receive an artificial hand at Manchester Royal Infirmary. When I was discharged from hospital I had my hand to deal with and I also limped for a couple of years because of the shrapnel injuries to my leg. The shrapnel damaged the muscle in my leg. As a result I was told that my leg would take a long time to heal.

11. Prior to the accident I had never received a blood transfusion. I had an operation to remove one of my kidneys in the 1990's, and I think that I may have had transfusions during this operation.

12. As a young man in my 30's I began to feel very tired. I caught both chicken pox and shingles. Any virus or disease that was going around, I would catch it. If it was a cold, I wouldn't just get a little sniffle, I would get a full blown cold. I remember that my grandma would always say, 'you are a sickly lad, what have you got this week?'

13. I had initially worked as a labourer and I then worked on sprinkler systems. I was laid off from this job for health and safety reasons. I went back to labouring on sites in my mid-30s and I found that I could not do the work. I was tired all the time and could not cope with the 8 to 10 hour days.

14. I did this work for two and a half years before I was laid off, quite rightly, because physically, I could not do the work. Looking back now, I know this was because of Hepatitis C, but at the time it never dawned on me, I thought that I was just weak or out of practice with labouring work. I couldn't understand why my mates could keep up with the work but I could not. I have not worked since I was laid off from the labouring job. I was on benefits for a while, but they were eventually stopped.

15. In my 30's I also started to develop brain fog. I found that I could not concentrate on things. I had to give up playing snooker as I could not focus. I also had aches and pains. I just thought it was me, I had no idea that I could have Hepatitis C. I got more cantankerous, impatient and short-tempered. Over the years it got worse, but I just put it down to old age. From around the age of 35-38 and onwards, I was nauseous, tired and achy. I just thought that it was the way that I was. I just carried on, and thought that I needed to get an easier job. I had no idea about Hepatitis.
16. I had been having blood tests for many years, as the doctors were trying to figure out what was wrong with me. For years they could not find anything wrong with me. I kept having the standard blood tests and nothing was showing up.
17. At one point, sometime during 2016, there was a new, young doctor at my GP surgery. I cannot recall his name. When I went to see him he told me that I should be tested for Hepatitis C. The test was done and I was found to be Hepatitis C positive. He referred me to a Consultant by the name of Doctor GRO-B at the GRO-B
18. As far as I am aware, before I was seen by the young doctor, none of my other doctors had ever sent me for a Hepatitis C test, despite the fact that the symptoms I was presenting with were consistent with Hepatitis C.
19. The previous doctors I saw had known me all of my life and they should have picked up the Hepatitis given the symptoms and difficulties I was presenting with. They kept saying, we have to send you for this scan and that test, for years, and nothing was resolved, and then I saw the young doctor and I was diagnosed right away.

20. When I saw Doctor [GRO-B] I didn't know anything about Hepatitis C. He told me that I would have contracted it from blood transfusions I had during my surgeries.
21. When I was diagnosed, I rang [GRO-B] and told her about the diagnosis. She asked me what Hepatitis C was. We knew about Hepatitis B, but we had no idea about Hepatitis C. [GRO-B] did some research about the disease on google.
22. Doctor [GRO-B] said to me, words to the effect of "If there was ever a good time to get Hepatitis C, it is now, as we can cure it". He started me on a course of treatment right away. I was given 6 months of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment. The Interferon was a weekly injection in my stomach, which I did every Tuesday at home. I took the Ribavirin tablets daily.
23. I received my treatment at the [GRO-B] clinic. A Hepatitis C nurse at the clinic named [GRO-B] oversaw my treatment. She was working with Doctor [GRO-B]. At first I would go to see her once a week, then one every 2 weeks, 4 weeks and so on, until the treatment ended. She was really good. She spoke to me directly, there was no beating around the bush with her.
24. [GRO-B] gave us information about the infection and how it could be transmitted. She advised [GRO-B] to be tested for Hepatitis C. [GRO-B] asked our GP whether the children should be tested and he said no. [GRO-B] informed us about the risk of infection from sharing toothbrushes, razors etc.
25. When I was on the treatment another drug came out which was more effective and had no side-effects. However, I just missed out on the drug as it came out after I had already started on the Interferon and Ribavirin combination.

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26. I remember that there were other patients at the clinic, but I was never introduced to them. We talked in the waiting room, but we were never formally introduced to each other. I think that some of them may have also contracted Hepatitis from infected blood.

27. I was told by Doctor [GRO-B] that there was a possibility that the treatment may or may not be successful. When the 6 months elapsed I was told that they were sure that I was 95% cured. They said that they could never guarantee that I would be 100% cured.

28. I was told that the treatment had worked and done what it was meant to do. I have not been back to the Doctor for a check-up since my treatment ended.

29. I may have had annual blood tests, but I can't remember. I don't recall having any liver function tests, certainly not for the last few years.

30. I recall that before I started my treatment I had an ultrasound and a fibroscan, but I can't remember what the results were. The final time that I met with [GRO-B] she said that my liver was good and it would stay that way as long as I looked after it.

31. I do not think that I was warned about the risk of being exposed to infection when I received the blood transfusions, and I cannot say that I consented to the doctors giving me the transfusions during my surgeries, as it was an emergency situation.

32. I just feel dead lucky that the young doctor did perform the Hepatitis C test and we discovered it. If he had not done this, it may have been another 10 years until I was diagnosed, and the damage done may have been worse. I feel grateful that I was diagnosed when I was.

33. GRO-B remembers reading about all of the different stages of the Hepatitis C disease on google and feeling scared about it. She didn't tell me about the different stages at the time, we just thought that we would take things one step at a time.

34. I have never used intravenous drugs and I am not a big drinker. I do several tattoos and an ear piercing. However all these were professionally done.

Section 3. Other Infections

35. As far as I am aware, I did not receive any other infections besides Hepatitis C.

Section 4. Consent

36. As I mentioned previously, I do not think that I could consent to the blood transfusions I received during my surgeries at Wigan Royal Infirmary as I was given them while I was unconscious during emergency operations.

Section 5. Impact

37. The Hepatitis C treatment was murder. I remember that I would administer the Interferon injection every Tuesday at 11am. I was warned that side-effects could be tiredness, mood swings and depression.

38. Some of the side-effects I experienced were feeling very cold, fatigued and having problems with my sleep. I remember having sleeping fits and I remember being so tired that I could not even walk 100 yards down the road.

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39. I also recall feeling depressed, like I would not live to see the next morning. I remember feeling very emotional after taking the first Interferon injection. I also lost my appetite. I couldn't finish any of my meals and I lost a bit of weight. The thought of eating food made me feel sick.
40. One of the other effects of Hepatitis C was a loss of concentration. I couldn't focus on anything. I couldn't play snooker as I could not concentrate on the game, I just could not be bothered, it was a chore. At the time, I did not know that this was a symptom of Hepatitis C. I thought it was just me.
41. I was never told that Interferon was a chemotherapy type of drug. If I knew then I wouldn't have taken it. I wish I had known these things at the time.
42. Since I have been diagnosed with Hepatitis C, I have had terrible recurring nightmares which have disrupted my sleep. I always have the same dream. In the dream, I am in the Wigan Royal Infirmary, where I received the blood transfusions.
43. A doctor tells the nurse to get more blood and the nurse goes through swinging doors into a room with shelves of blood bags. I am shouting at the nurse, 'pick bag number 4', as I know that the blood in this bag is infected with Hepatitis C, and the others are infected with HIV. I feel lucky and relieved that the nurse chooses bag number 4 and I get Hepatitis C, instead of HIV. I have been having this dream for years and I have been having problems with my sleep for years, which affects my mood.
44. I have also suffered depression after my diagnosis and treatment for Hepatitis C. I was never the happiest person to start with, but I became

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very depressed after finding out I had Hepatitis C. While I was having the treatment I experienced suicidal thoughts.

45. When I was younger I would get depressed a lot. I remember that my Grandma would always ask what was wrong with me. At the time I thought nothing of it, but now I see that it may have been a symptom of Hepatitis C.

46. I have been unable to work since I was in my 30's due to the symptoms caused by Hepatitis C. I struggled to find a job that I was able to do, given the symptoms I was experiencing. As I mentioned previously, I was not able to work long hours as a labourer, and I would not have been able to work in an office as I was always so tired and I had trouble concentrating. Due to my lack of ability to concentrate, I don't think that I could have gone on to gain any other qualifications.

47. I was meant to join the army and I was waiting to start when I turned 16, but then I had the accident so I was unable to join. It was either the army or the pits for me, and if it was not for the accident I would now be in the army.

48. GRO-B worked full-time until our daughter was born, and continued working part-time after she was born. I looked after our daughter while she worked. I was receiving an invalidity payment, which was then stopped. I was not told why the payment was cancelled.

49. During my first marriage I rented a house from my cousins, but when I met GRO-B we were able to take out a mortgage and buy our own home. We have been lucky to live in the same home ever since.

50. It has not been easy living without work. I would say that financially, we struggled. We managed to get by, but we could not afford luxuries such

as a car and going on holidays. Had I been able to work, we would have been able to afford these things.

51. GRO-B was only able to buy a car around 3 years ago. She learned to drive and bought the car after she was made redundant from her job at the time. She was only able to afford the car and the lessons once she received the redundancy payout.

52. I knew that there was a stigma associated with Hepatitis C at the time, like there was with HIV. I was paranoid about what others would think so I didn't tell anyone. When I first found out about my diagnosis, I told GRO-B not to tell anyone as I was afraid that they would think that I am a drug user.

53. The way that I found out about Hepatitis C was through knowing drug users who had contracted it through drugs. I think that most people were not aware of the media coverage around contaminated blood and it was never brought up in conversation when I was out. Even though it was a big scandal for the NHS, people just did not know about it.

54. I just didn't want anyone knowing that I had Hepatitis C, in case they wondered how I got it. At the time, it was not well known that some Hepatitis C infections were caused by contaminated NHS blood transfusions. I ended up telling my mother, GRO-B and my daughters, but no one else outside of the immediate family. They are the only people who know about my infected status even until today. I am a very private person.

55. When I go to the pub, I am usually the youngest in my group of mates, and I know that if I told them there would be a thousand and one questions about it, so I just keep it to myself. I felt like I would have been ostracized if I told them.

56. I would frequently go out for a drink with my mates, but when I got Hepatitis C I began feeling very tired and stopped going out. When my mates would come to visit me and they asked if I was ok, I would give them any excuse for my absence to cover-up the fact that I had Hepatitis C.

57. I remember at one point a friend of mine said that he could get me a job repairing fences at a race course. To start the job I had to sign a form declaring whether I had any illnesses. I did not sign the form as I did not want to declare my Hepatitis C status because of the stigma associated with it.

58. I did not tell my friend why I turned down the job. I remember seeing my friend's hands, and they were always covered in cuts and grazes from the work. I was scared that I would cut myself on the job and there would be a risk that I could transmit the infection to my colleague's.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

59. I was never offered counselling or psychological support while I was on the treatment. I would have taken it as I was desperate. I wish that I had been offered counselling then as I was having problems with my sleep because of the constant nightmares I was having.

60. I remember receiving a letter from EIBSS which informed us that we could access discretionary counselling through EIBSS up to the value of £900.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

61. I found out about the Skipton Fund through Doctor GRO-B. When we first visited him and he diagnosed me with Hepatitis C he told me to get

in touch with Skipton. At the time, I was not sure who they were, so we did not take any action.

62. When we went to see the Hepatitis C nurse, GRO-B she asked us if we had completed the Skipton forms. She told me that I would get £20,000, so I filled out the forms and received the payment a couple of months later. This was the stage 1 payment and I received it around June 2016.

63. Toward the end of that year I also received backdated payments of the monthly payment from Skipton, which were £400 per month. This payment has now been raised to £1500 per month under the EIBSS.

64. I do not remember having to sign a waiver in relation to taking legal action against the government in order to receive the payment. However, I do remember signing something saying that the stage 1 payment I was receiving was a one-off payment.

65. I remember reading that there would be a 5 year review of the Skipton payments, so I was expecting my payments to end this year. I was relieved to find out that this is not the case.

Section 8. Other Issues

66. I believe that the parties responsible should be prosecuted. Someone would have known something. They knew the blood was not fit and it was not screened. They took a chance in using it and it backfired, and for that they should be prosecuted.

67. The Chair of the Inquiry has commented that the Inquiry has approached doctors and politicians to give written statements, but they have asserted that they cannot write their statements because of their age and ill health, but I am sure that they have no problem lifting their

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gin and tonics. So, they should be able to provide something to the Inquiry.

68. I appreciate that the Inquiry cannot force them to provide a written statement, but I think that they should at least be made to dictate a statement if they cannot write one. I think that as long as they are of sound mind they should be able to give a statement to the Inquiry, even if they are old and frail.

69. I think that they brushed the issue of contaminated blood under the carpet, hoping that it would go away, but it hasn't and people are dying. That is what makes my blood boil. They cannot get away with it, and if I can play a small part in helping to hold them accountable, I will.

70. I would usually stay away from something like the Inquiry as I am a very private person. I am a nervous wreck and I hate being around lots of people that I don't know, but this is worth it. They should not get away with this. I don't want anything like this to happen again.

71. I feel lucky in comparison to people who died from Hepatitis C and the children who lost their parents.

72. I want to know why the NHS did not contact us once they knew about the contaminated blood. Everyone who received a blood transfusion during the relevant time should have been contacted and tested for Hepatitis C. This was not done, and for many years I did not even know that I had Hepatitis C. I am sure that there are people walking around now who don't know that they are infected with Hepatitis C.

Statement of Truth

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

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Signed GRO-B

Dated 18/6/21