

# ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No: WITN5954001

Exhibits: 0

Dated:

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRO-B

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B but I most often go by my nickname of GRO-B. My date of birth is GRO-B 1951. Whilst full details of my address are known to the Inquiry it is sufficient to say I live in the North East of England. I married my wife, GRO-B in GRO-B and we have one daughter. I am currently employed by the GRO-B as a GRO-B GRO-B having previously enjoyed a long career as a welder.
2. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV") after 1985. In particular, the nature of how I had learnt about my infection, how my illness had affected me and our family thereafter, and the financial assistance I have received.
3. I can confirm that I have chosen not to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me.

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4. The Inquiry Investigator has explained to me the 'Right to Reply' procedure, and I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.
5. I wish to acknowledge that naturally as time passes, memories can fade. I have been able to provide approximate timeframes for matters based on life events. However, these timeframes should be accepted as 'near to' rather than precise dates.
6. I have constructed this statement with access to my medical records.

### **Section 2. How Infected.**

7. I will first explain the circumstances through which I became infected and, following this, I will consider how I discovered my positive HCV infection status.
8. Through my employment as a welder, I had been asked to do a welding test called a 6g pipe test in 1985 where I was the victim of an industrial accident. I was working in an enclosed space on a grinder when it suddenly shattered and a chunk of the grinder pierced the skin on my face and became impaled on the left hand side of my chin. I was urgently rushed to Darlington Memorial Hospital where I was met by my wife and daughter who had been contacted immediately after the incident occurred.
9. I was treated for the laceration to my face and the doctors stitched the wound. I was able to leave the hospital relatively swiftly as the doctors were happy with the wound only being cleaned and stitched over.
10. However, that same afternoon whilst at home it became apparent that the treatment I had received for the wound had been inadequate. This is because, in one instance, my daughter noticed that there was blood running down my face and neck from the wound. My wife had been out of the house at the time,

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so upon her return, we called the doctor's surgery and I was taken back to hospital.

11. The doctors quickly established that I had suffered a burst artery. I recall there being lots of blood and the clinicians were concerned with how much blood I was losing. My wife was very distressed and had to leave the room at the time because of the quantity of blood loss.
12. The doctors proceeded to inform me that I required an operation to remedy the burst artery. I recall consenting to this, albeit not clearly due to the condition that I was in at the time. This was the only procedure which I consented to and I do not recall being asked whether I consented to a blood transfusion. After this, the only thing I remember is waking up in intensive care and this was post operation.
13. I remained in intensive care for a day before being moved to a recovery ward where I was able to have visitors so my wife and daughter joined me. I recall that a HR representative from my company made a visit to check on my recovery. However they were not greeted kindly as my wife had become angry with the situation.
14. I proceeded to make what seemed like a full recovery and at no point was I told by any clinician that I had suffered any lasting damage or illness, aside from scarring.
15. Up to the incident, I had been a regular blood donor and had donated blood on several occasions in the run up to my accident. I enjoyed this process as I felt that it was a good way of helping others in need.
16. After the incident, I went in to donate blood again and the clinicians proceeded to take my blood as usual. However, a few weeks after the donation, I received a letter from my GP stating that my blood donation could not be used because it was infected with HCV. I was totally shocked at this news, as was my wife. At this point, I had no idea what had caused the

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infection and the uncertainty was very concerning. The letter also stated that I would not, in the future, be able to donate blood given that I was HCV positive which was additionally disappointing.

17. Immediately after receiving this news I was sent up to the Freeman's Hospital in Newcastle to begin treatment for the infection albeit I remained uncertain over what had actually caused the infection at this stage. At the Freeman's Hospital, I was treated by Dr Bassendine (a registrar) who very quickly directed me towards the Skipton Fund. The Skipton Fund asked for information which my GP, Dr GRO-B was able to retrieve from my medical history.

18. It was at this point that I discovered that I had been in receipt of 2 pints of blood during my operation at Darlington Hospital. This was because Dr GRO-B had accessed my information regarding my treatment at Darlington Hospital which stated that I had been transfused 2 pints of blood during the procedure to resolve the burst artery. This was the first time that I had been told this and it came as a total shock. I was very disappointed by the failure on behalf of the doctors at Darlington Hospital to inform me that I had received blood during the operation. I believe they had a duty to notify me of this information even though it had been used during my procedure as a necessity.

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19. The information regarding my blood transfusion was passed onto Dr Bassendine so that I was ultimately able to obtain compensation from the Skipton Fund.

20. Clearly, I was never told about the risks of infection from blood transfusions because I was never told that I had been in receipt of blood by any of the doctors who treated me for the burst artery. I therefore was not able to consent to the blood transfusions and the associated risks.

21. As soon as my treatment began at the Freeman's Hospital, with Dr Bassendine, I was provided with ample information on the infection and how it would affect my life. I was also provided with adequate information on how to

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manage the infection. Dr Bassendine was very helpful, addressing all of my concerns and questions and I felt she was a very competent doctor.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

22. I can confirm that I did not suffer or contract any other infection as a consequence of my medical treatment.

### **Section 4. Consent**

23. As stated above, I was not able to consent to the blood transfusion that I received as I was not aware that I needed one. The possibility of needing such a procedure was not addressed prior to my operation. It is difficult to comment, at this point, on whether I would have consented to the treatment as it was used to save my life at the time.

24. During the course of my HCV treatment I was put on a Cod Liver Oil treatment plan. This was the only time during which I felt that I was being put on a treatment plan which doctors were using as a trial.

### **Section 5. Impact**

25. I have tried my best to ensure that my HCV infection had, and continues to have, a minimal impact on my life. As soon as I became aware of my positive infection status, I stopped drinking alcohol and improved my exercise regime. In addition, having never been a smoker of cigarettes, I continued to avoid such products so as to maintain as full a bill of health as I possibly could. I managed to avoid drinking alcohol for 10 years after my diagnosis and I believe that this, particularly, has helped in dealing with the infection.

26. I believe that I have succeeded in improving my lifestyle, as above, to the extent that my infection has had a very limited impact on my life. I can happily say that the infection has not, in recent times, affected my life and I consider my lifestyle changes to be contributory factors.

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27. Moreover, I am a generally positive person and I have attempted to be as positive as possible with my situation since my diagnosis. I have done this to ensure that the mental effect of my HCV infection was minimal. I have never dwelled on what has happened and I am of the belief that this has contributed to the ease with which I have dealt with the circumstances.
28. Further, because of the success of the treatment I have received I am now clear of the virus and have been signed off by the responsible clinicians. I now do not need to see a doctor and am not asked to make regular visits to the hospital for check-ups.
29. Having said that, I continue to live my life as if I am still infected with HCV as I feel the change in lifestyle has improved my overall health and wellbeing and this is something which I would like to maintain.
30. Aside from feeling tired and achy I have not suffered from any physical effects from my HCV infection. Initially I put the tiredness and aches down to my general working hours, but I now realise that these may have been symptoms of my HCV infection.
31. I can confirm that I have never suffered with depression or brain fog as a consequence of my infection.
32. As stated, treatment for my HCV infection was provided at the Freeman's Hospital predominantly by Dr Bassendine. In the early stages I would attend a clinic with Dr Bassendine every 6 months for testing and general check-ups. I also had multiple, overnight liver biopsy's taken for further testing on my liver together with ultrasound scans to ascertain the extent of damage and the rate of progression.
33. My first round of treatment was with the Cod Liver trial and this was provided by Dr Bassendine. I was happy to trial what was seen as a new drug at the time at the Newcastle Royal Victoria Hospital. The drug was administered in

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the form of 250mgs tablets given 2 or 3 times a day. This was trialled for 2 to 3 months before being halted as it did not seem to be working.

34. Dr Bassendine then changed my treatment in the early 1990s. This change was to a combination of drugs, Interferon and Ribavirin. Interferon was administered through a weekly injection which I was asked to do myself and Ribavirin was administered as a daily tablet. Unfortunately this treatment plan only lasted 2 to 3 weeks as I was unable to cope with the side effects of the drugs. The side effects manifested through an increase in aches and pains as well as extensive tiredness. My wife was in agreement in cancelling the treatment plan as she also witnessed the impacts that the achiness and tiredness had on my life.
35. After this, Dr Bassendine retired and my care was passed to another doctor at the Freeman's Hospital. I was provided with another treatment plan and I believe it was antibiotic-based, but I am not certain of this.
36. The most recent treatment that I have received was offered to me around 4 to 5 years ago. Again, I cannot recall exactly what this treatment was but I am confident that it has been this treatment plan which has cleared me of the virus.
37. The worst treatment that I received was in the second round with the interferon and Ribavirin combination. I struggled with this treatment greatly due to the adverse side effects. I recall that I was working with the maintenance team at the GRO-B at the time and it was very difficult to continue with the maintenance work due to the fatigue that the treatment was causing. Dr Bassendine had warned me of the possible side effects so I knew what to expect, but in reality it had too much of an impact on my life to justify continuing with the treatment.
38. As stated, I have done my best to ensure that the HCV infection has had a minimal effect on my life and I feel that I have been successful with this. In addition, the infection has had a minimal financial impact on myself and my

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family. Both my wife and I enjoyed long careers and we, therefore, benefited from having a dual household income and this has been a factor in our ability to cope, financially, with my infection. I have also been able to afford supporting my daughter with major expenses which indicates that there has been no financial impact on us as a family.

39. Further, as far as I am aware, I believe that the infection has not had an impact on my employment prospects. At no point do I think I was discriminated against for reasons associated with my infection.

40. I only feel a need to notify those who I think need to know about my infection including my immediate family. As a consequence of this, very few people know about my infection and this aspect of my medical history. I have, therefore, not suffered from any stigma surrounding the condition. In general, I do not like this sort of thing being publicised, because of the associated stigma, so I have favoured not telling most people in my life.

41. Since my meeting with the Inquiry investigators I have discussed all this with my daughter and I have learnt, for the first time, how my illness and treatment adversely affected my late wife. I was not aware of how seriously my wife had been impacted by my illness. My daughter has told me how scared my wife was at the time. It was evidently as a result of her desire to protect me that she never revealed her fears.

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### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

42. I distinctly remember having regular ultrasound scans over the years, as part of my routine check-ups. The doctors would say my liver was always just a brighter colour than a normal liver. Often the doctors would just tell me that the liver was in a similar condition to what it had been when they previously checked, so I had nothing major to be concerned about.

43. There were moments in the Freeman's Hospital where I became frightened by other people in the ward, particularly when I was in to have a liver biopsy. The



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other patients who were suffering from liver disease or damage, unfortunately had a jaundiced appearance and this always scared me. It was partially because of this that I committed to avoiding alcohol in the hope that I would avoid more significant liver damage.

44. I believe that I never encountered any problems or obstacles in obtaining treatment care or support from those responsible for my care. I was lucky to be under the care of Dr Bassendine for the majority of my hospital and clinical care. She looked after me well.

### Section 7. Financial Assistance

45. As soon as the application from the Skipton Fund was approved, I was paid a lump sum payment, the total of which I cannot be certain on. Since then, I have been paid a monthly amount of £1500 from the English Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS). At no stage did I struggle with obtaining any compensation payments and, in fact, I always found it to be a smooth process. Again, I benefited from the services of Dr Bassendine who provided lots of guidance with respect to financial support.

46. For the purposes of the Skipton Fund, it seemed that all that was required was proof that I had received a blood transfusion during the operation and that I did not have HCV before the procedure. Dr GRO-B and Dr Bassendine collaborated to ensure that this information was passed onto the Skipton Fund as soon as they had it.

47. I also received compensation from my employer as it was proved that they had not complied with health and safety regulations on the site that I had been working on when the accident happened.

### Section 8. Other Issues

48. I have done my best to ensure that this infection does not have a big impact on myself and my life. The best thing to do, for me, was to accept it and move

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forward rather than dwelling on it. I was told that I was given blood at the time to save my life, but, I am of the belief that the clinicians had a duty to ensure that I was aware of the risks associated with such treatments, even if that could only be after the procedure.

49. If those in positions of power at the time were aware of any infected blood or even an increased risk of infected blood then I believe it would have been wrong to use the blood. This is why it is crucial that this Inquiry establishes the full truth, so that all those who have been affected by the circumstances can achieve some closure from the situation.

### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed GRO-B

Dated 12 3 2022