

Statement No.: WITN3734001

Exhibits: None

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 10/02/2020.

I, **GRO-B** will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is **GRO-B**. My date of birth is **GRO-B** and my address is known to the Inquiry. I live on my own in rented accommodation. I am unemployed. I previously worked at a furniture warehouse but I have not worked since the accident that led to me being infected with HIV.
2. I intend to speak about becoming infected with HIV which I contracted through a blood transfusion, approximately 30 years ago. I intend to discuss the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on my life.

Section 2. How Infected

3. Approximately 30 years ago, I was involved in a road traffic accident when visiting a friend in Manchester. I was taken to a hospital in Manchester that I believe no longer exists. I had suffered a broken pelvis as a result of the accident and was in a coma for 3 days.

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4. Whilst in the coma I was given a blood transfusion. I am unaware of how many transfusions I received during this period. I did not know that I had received a transfusion at this time and only found out about this at a later date.
5. After spending around 3 weeks in hospital in Manchester, I was transferred by ambulance to Leeds General Infirmary where I spent around a week and a half before being discharged home. I was not told anything about the blood transfusion I had received at this point. I may have found out sometime after leaving hospital when visiting my own GP, however, I'm not sure when exactly I found this out.
6. A few years after the accident I started feeling unwell and tired a lot of the time. I decided to see my GP who sent me to GRO-B Hospital, as I was living there then, for some further tests. I waited for around a week for the results and I was told by my GP that I was HIV positive.
7. My GP asked me some questions about my sexuality and whether I could have contracted HIV through sex with a man. He did not suggest that I could have acquired HIV through a blood transfusion at this stage.
8. I was not given much advice about the infection when I was first told I was HIV positive. The only thing I was told was to use condoms when having sexual intercourse. I did not really understand the risks about passing on the infection and I did have unprotected sex.
9. I believe I should have been provided with more information about HIV and there should have been more discussion about how I may have acquired it, rather than just questioning my sexuality. I knew the only way I could have become infected with HIV was through the blood transfusion as I have never had sex with a man and I have never used drugs of any kind. This should have been something the doctor discussed with me rather than I having to reach my own conclusion at this stage.
10. After my diagnosis I was prescribed some tablets by my doctor which I took. I was not really given an explanation about this medication and the potential side effects it would have.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. I am not aware of being infected with any infection other than HIV as a result of being exposed to infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

12. I did not consent to the blood transfusion I received. However, I was in a coma when the blood was given so I would have been unable to offer consent at this time. If I had known about the risks involved with a blood transfusion and the possibility of contracting HIV, I do not think I would have consented to it.
13. I do not believe I was treated for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

14. After being infected with HIV, I became very upset and angry about the situation. I became a more aggressive person than I had been before my diagnosis and often got angry with my partner and my children. I started drinking more and more and eventually ended up drinking heavily every day for a long period of time. I also developed depression and felt very low about the situation I was in.
15. When I was first diagnosed with HIV I was prescribed some tablets to take. I do not have much understanding about the different types of treatment available for my condition but I have always taken the medication I have been prescribed by my doctor, ever since my diagnosis. I visit my doctor every 3-6 months and over the years they have adjusted my medication approximately 3 times.
16. I have not had problems with accessing medication or treatment for my HIV in recent years; when I was first diagnosed the medication was a bit more difficult to access. However, whilst I was in prison recently for 5 weeks, following a motoring conviction, I had difficulty in accessing my HIV medication. They were unable to provide me with my medication for a week. I don't think it should be like this as these delays could seriously impact my health.
17. The medication I was first prescribed for the HIV made me extremely tired. I was unable to do much and often felt like sleeping all day. I also sometimes felt as if I was going crazy because of the depression and mood swings that I was suffering. I think these issues were linked to the medication. I was not warned about these potential side effects of the HIV medication. However, when I explained to my GP about how I was feeling and these symptoms, he told me these were probably side effects of the medication. I believe I should have been told about this before I started the medication.

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18. Although my medication has changed over the years, I still have days where I feel like I can get up and about but other days where I feel very low. I still suffer from depression which started with my diagnosis.
19. Being infected has impacted upon my dental care. A dental practice near where I lived refused to treat me when I told them I am HIV positive. I now receive treatment from a different dentist.
20. I also believe I have faced stigma from the medical profession due to my HIV diagnosis. It is my opinion that once a doctor or nurse knows about your HIV status, they treat you worse as a result. I think this may be because they do not know how I acquired it and think I am either a drug user or I am gay. Years after my diagnosis I had an accident where I ended up with a broken neck and had to spend some time in hospital. I was put in a private room in a special ward because of my HIV status. I feel that I got funny looks and got treated less favourably. Even though no one said anything directly to me, it made me feel uncomfortable.
21. Being infected with HIV has had a major impact on my private life. I was living with my partner at the time when I learned about my HIV status. We lived together for about 15 years. Although we stayed together for some time following my diagnosis and treatment, she was unhappy with my drinking, anger issues and the stigma attached to my HIV diagnosis. Although I stopped drinking, she decided to leave me anyway. By this point we had one child together who was then still a baby. We continued to see each other on and off and had 2 further children together. My children are now aged 18, 15 and 12 but I haven't seen them in many years and do not know their whereabouts. I have completely lost contact with my former partner. I am trying to trace my children with the help of the Salvation Army in London.
22. As far as I am aware, my partner and children have tested negative for HIV. At the time of having the children I was not really clear on the risks of passing on HIV to my partner or children. I was told to use condoms when having sexual intercourse but the risks of not doing so were not made clear to me.
23. When first diagnosed with HIV I was acutely aware of the stigma associated with this condition which was prevalent at that time. In order to avoid any discrimination I chose to change my name by deed poll from my birth name, GRO-B to GRO-B This is the name I am now known by. In reality the fact I changed my name has had little effect. I continued to suffer the stigma associated with being HIV positive.
24. I believe if I had not been infected with HIV I would not have suffered mentally, physically and financially as a result, I would not have lost contact with my

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children and my partner. I have lived alone since she left me and been kept apart from our children.

25. My relationship with my family also deteriorated after my HIV diagnosis. Although I explained to them that I became infected with HIV as a result of a blood transfusion, members of my family questioned my sexuality and implied that I was gay. My brother told many of our family members about my HIV status and most have decided not to have a relationship with me. Although I see my brother occasionally, we do not have a good relationship. I have felt isolated from my family since the diagnosis. My mother has also recently passed away.
26. As my partner and children are no longer in contact with me, I don't believe the stigma of my HIV status affects them anymore. However, I believe my partner was affected by the stigma of my status when we were still together. I believe this is partly why she decided to end our relationship. I also believe members of my family decided to limit our relationship because of the stigma attached to my HIV diagnosis and not wanting to be associated with it.
27. My HIV status has also impacted my social life. I lost a lot of friends as my brother and other family members told my friends and a lot of other people (including some of my neighbours) about my HIV status. Nobody really comes to visit me anymore because of this and I think they do not want the stigma attached to having a friend who is HIV positive. I only have a few friends that I still associate with. I have a support worker that visits me once a week which I am happy about as I do not get many visitors.
28. I was a shy person before the diagnosis but I have become much shyer since. I feel uncomfortable interacting with people in general. I feel a bit better around people that do not know about my HIV status but unfortunately a lot of people in my area know about my HIV status. I have been to some of the centres in Leeds that provide meals and support for people struggling financially, but I have only visited these centres a few times. Although I would like to go more often for the hot meal, I feel uncomfortable interacting socially with the other people at the centre. I think this is in part due to worry that they will find out about my HIV status and the stigma attached to people knowing this about me.
29. I also find it difficult to walk for long distances and to climb stairs. This is a result of ongoing tiredness which I have suffered from since being infected with HIV. I also have become more out of breath following a heart bypass operation I had a few years ago. This affects my ability to go out, socialise and do things independently.
30. I had already finished my education when I was diagnosed with HIV so the diagnosis did not affect my schooling. However, I have always struggled at

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school and as a result have difficulties with reading and writing. This has impacted my ability to understand my treatment options for HIV and has limited my ability to research financial assistance that I may be entitled to.

31. Before the road traffic accident, I was working at a furniture warehouse. However, I suffered a broken pelvis as a result of the accident and was on crutches for some time. This meant that I was unable to engage in the physical work required for this job. When I was well enough to get back to work they were closing down so I would have to apply to a new place for work. Around this time, I started feeling quite tired and generally unwell which I would later find out was as a result of the HIV I had been infected with. Eventually I went to my GP about these symptoms and got the diagnosis that I was HIV positive. After my HIV diagnosis and the side effects of the medication, I decided not to return to work as I felt I would not be able to cope with a job. I have also suffered further health complications including a broken neck and heart problems, both of which have further affected my ability to work.
32. My HIV diagnosis has had a terrible effect on my finances. As I have been unable to work since my accident and HIV diagnosis, I have been reliant on government benefits to survive. Previously I was receiving Personal Independence Payments but now I am only receiving money through Universal Credit. This has been extremely problematic for me. I receive approximately £359 a fortnight and with this I need to pay my rent and cover my other expenses including topping up the gas and electricity metres, pay for my television license and pay off a court fine. This often leaves me with just £15-20 a fortnight for food but sometimes not even that if I have other expenses. I have no savings at all.
33. My support worker who visits me has given me vouchers to use the food bank as I often cannot afford to buy food, but I feel ashamed to go there. My grandmother would have been shocked to see me having to use a food bank to survive. When I do visit the food bank they give me tinned or packaged items which is helpful, but often means I am only eating rice, pasta or beans. I would like to be able to eat proper hot meals but I cannot afford the ingredients to cook them. I am on the waiting list for a council house now and I am on the A band as I have problems with my mobility. Being on the A band should mean I am a priority to get a house. I am hoping things improve once I get this new place to live and that I will have more money for food.
34. Before I was diagnosed with HIV and I was still working, I did not have these kinds of financial worries. For example, if my washing machine broke I would be able to go out and buy a new one. Now I resort to buying a scrap one which will break in a few months anyway and have to be replaced.

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35. My friends have their own houses and have money which is very different to my situation. My friend gave me £10 for my birthday recently which was very helpful. I feel that if I had not been infected with HIV I would have had more opportunities in life and would have been more financially stable.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

36. I have never received any financial assistance from any trust or fund. I was not aware that there is financial assistance available for people who have been infected with HIV through a blood transfusion. If I had been made aware of this before it would have helped my financial situation significantly. I hope to make a claim for financial assistance in the future with the assistance of my support worker.
37. The only assistance I have ever received is through an HIV/AIDS charity in Leeds. I believe it is now called Skyline but it may have been called something different before. They paid for me to get a new washing machine when mine broke. However, since going to prison I have been told I cannot get assistance from them in the future.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated

6-3-20