

ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN4518001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 13th November 2020

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 14 September 2020.

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

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B (nee GRO-B) and my date of birth is GRO-B 1961. I live in GRO-B London and my full address is known to the Inquiry. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C (HCV). In particular, the origin of my infection, the treatment I have received and the subsequent impact on my personal life, as well as my mental health and the impact on my husband.
2. I am currently not working, but I have previously worked as GRO-B GRO-B, and have always had jobs in the car industry. I have been married to my husband GRO-B for 32 years. We do not have any children.
3. I confirm that I am not currently legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist with my statement. I wish to be treated as an anonymous witness.

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Section 2. How Infected

4. When I was in secondary school, I would sometimes bunk off with my friends. One time, in 1978, we went to see this guy that we knew who lived near the school. I didn't know him well, I would just say that I was sort of familiar with him. When we got there, he just made a bee-line for me and he raped me. My friends were not aware of what had happened to me, no one knew.
5. I told my parents about what had happened but they didn't really do anything about it. My mother was a catholic, so she swept it under the carpet and did nothing about it. I come from a bad background and did not have a good relationship with my parents. My two brothers were their focus. I was always getting thrown out of home and getting into fights with my mum. They just brushed it under the carpet and did not report it to the police.
6. Soon after I was raped, I was walking to school and I started passing huge blood clots that looked like lumps of liver, almost like an extremely heavy period. I passed out and was taken to St Stephen's Hospital (which has now been replaced by the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital). I don't remember it happening, but I assume I was taken there in an ambulance.
7. The next thing I do remember is waking up in St Stephen's Hospital, with all sorts of wires and tubes coming out of me. I was completely unable to move – it was horrendous. The attack had really messed up my insides and had damaged me so badly down there that I had lost a lot of blood and had required a blood transfusion. This all happened in 1978 when I was 17 years old.
8. Still nothing was done about the rape. I was too ill to provide a statement anyway, but I don't remember the police being involved at all. I believe that my attacker had moved to Germany not long after the incident. Nobody was interested in doing anything about it; it all just got shoved under the carpet. When I came out of the hospital, my doctor gave me a document of sorts, I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was essentially medical evidence documenting that I had been raped.

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9. I can't remember exactly how long I was in hospital for, other than I was in hospital for quite a while after my initial admission. I missed a lot of school and the whole thing had a huge impact on me. It basically ruined my life.
10. My reproductive organs were so badly damaged; my fallopian tubes were blocked and I, therefore, have been unable to conceive, which is hugely upsetting. However, I think to myself that if I had been able to conceive then the baby would have been born with hepatitis C.
11. I have subsequently had a full hysterectomy due to cancerous tumours caused by the blockages in my fallopian tubes, and the gynaecologist that performed the surgery even commented on how much of a mess it was. As a result of the detection of the cancerous cells I was advised to have the hysterectomy. I had the hysterectomy within the last 10 years, although I am unable to be specific about the exact date.
12. I met my husband [GRO-B] when I was about 25, sometime in the mid 1980s. He understood my pain and we have been together ever since. I met the right person who has looked after me. For a long while, every penny we both earned went towards IVF treatment that was unfortunately unsuccessful. Sometime later I did fall pregnant to [GRO-B] but I suffered a miscarriage eight weeks into my pregnancy and I lost a lot of blood. The emotional stress of the IVF treatment has been profound on both our lives. IVF treatment is very expensive and we spent all our savings on IVF treatment.
13. I have also struggled with schizophrenia throughout my life. I have had several hospitalisations as a result of my mental illness and have taken many different medications for the condition. I am now on medication which works and I have not had a relapse for about 3 years now. My husband is able to recognise any triggers and helps look after me.
14. A few years ago, I was having blood tests undertaken by my Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) in connection with my schizophrenia, to check that I was taking my medication. I was in Chelsea and Westminster Hospital at the time, where the blood tests were taken, and the doctor came down to see me

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after the tests were complete, which wouldn't usually have happened. He informed me that my blood tests revealed that I had hepatitis C and that I had been infected with it for years. I was given infected blood at St Stephen's hospital when I had the blood transfusion. This happened to me when I was 17 years old and I am now nearly sixty.

15. I have my ears pierced, but it was done professionally at a legitimate establishment. I have no tattoos and have never used intravenous drugs.

Section 3. Other Infections

16. To my knowledge, I have not been infected with any virus other than hepatitis C. However, I have never been tested for HIV.

Section 4. Consent

17. I do not remember providing my consent for the blood transfusion that I received at St Stephen's Hospital. However, I was hardly conscious when I was admitted and I also appreciate that I had lost so much blood that the transfusion may possibly have saved my life.
18. I was not informed that I was going to be tested for HCV which was done when they were routinely testing me to check I was taking the prescribed medication for my schizophrenia.
19. With regards to my schizophrenia, over the years I have been offered a lot of trials for new drugs, I think I was used as a guinea pig on some occasions regarding drugs for my mental health.

Section 7. Impact

20. When I was told about the HCV diagnosis, it was a massive shock to find out that I had been infected with HCV since I was 17. I was completely knocked for six. I couldn't believe it. My husband remembers me not being myself for a considerable time after the diagnosis. It really disturbed me.

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21. I was actually hospitalised not long after my diagnosis as a result of a psychotic episode. I am certain that being informed I had HCV contributed to the onset of this particular episode.
22. Of course, at the time, I was not aware that I was suffering from hepatitis, but I am now able to identify several physical symptoms I have experienced that may be attributable to my infection. I can remember suffering from terrible fatigue and insomnia; I was always very tired but simply unable to sleep. My ankles have also swollen up at several points throughout my life and I am told that this can be caused by hepatitis infection.
23. My HCV diagnosis has had a significant impact on my husband and our lives together. He has had the worry of it and recently has suffered ill health, concerning his heart and he is on medication to thin his blood. His ill-health worries me as concerns about death often trigger my schizophrenic episodes. When he was in hospital he worried about me as he was unable to keep an eye on me.
24. I have been diagnosed as close to becoming diabetic so I need to watch my weight.
25. I have also been diagnosed with a fatty liver as a result of my hepatitis C diagnosis. I don't drink alcohol so this can only have been caused by the HCV. I have to have regular fibroscans to monitor my liver. I was given my first liver fibroscan at Charing Cross Hospital shortly after my HCV diagnosis.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

26. When the doctor informed me of my diagnosis, he did tell me about the risk of infection from blood to blood contact and sexual intercourse. He also told me that I must inform my dentist. I feel he gave me adequate information about my infection and the risk to others. However, he did not offer GRO-B a hepatitis test. We had to obtain this ourselves. Fortunately GRO-B was negative. GRO-B has been tested twice and, on both occasions, he tested negative. The doctor didn't give me any advice on changes I should make to my diet or my drinking habits.

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27. I was put onto my first round of treatment a few years ago, although I cannot remember the name of the drug and I cannot be specific as to the date when I began this treatment. I think it lasted for six months and consisted of tablets. The treatment did not involve any injections, just tablets taken orally. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful.
28. Very soon after the conclusion of my first treatment, I was put onto another course of treatment with a different drug. This one lasted a few months and was a miracle drug. I got the all clear after the conclusion of this treatment and I am now completely cured of my HCV as a result of this wonder drug.
29. I understand that I fell into the right category to receive the treatment as it was connected to budgetary considerations and only so many people could receive it and I fitted into that group.
30. I had no problems when informing my dentist about my hepatitis C diagnosis. It didn't lead to any changes in my treatment and my dentist was fine about it.
31. I now have my blood tested regularly at the Kobler Clinic, which is part of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. I have a wonderful nurse there called Merci and they take good care of me. Initially I saw different clinicians but now my regular nurse is Merci. They monitor my liver function and also give me fibro-scans several times a year. My last scan was just a few weeks ago. I am due to have another blood test soon.
32. In terms of stigma, when I attend the Kobler clinic, I sometime see people I know there, and I feel embarrassed but then I think they must be there for the same reason. The clinic is attended by people with HCV and HIV. I don't like it when I see people I recognise.
33. No one knows about me being infected with HCV except for my close friend and my dad.
34. I have not been offered any psychological support or counselling as a result of my diagnosis.

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35. I still suffer from depression sometimes and have to manage it by thinking positive thoughts. I attribute this to what happened to me and being given infected blood as a result of the rape, which impacted my ability to have children.
36. One of the clinicians, at the Kobler Clinic told me about the Hepatitis C trust and also encouraged me to apply to the Skipton Fund for compensation, as he said I was entitled to it.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

37. My doctor, Dr Foxton, told me about the Skipton Fund quite a few years ago and advised me that I was entitled to some compensation from them. I didn't really think that there was a chance I wouldn't get it; I knew the only way I could have been infected was via the transfusion I received in 1978.
38. None of the forms were filled in by the doctor but we attached signed medical opinions from three different professionals. Every one of them, including my GP (Dr GRO-B from GRO-B), expressed the opinion that I was infected with hepatitis C by the blood transfusion I received in 1978.
39. My application was refused. I immediately launched an appeal, which was also refused. The reason given for the refusal was that there was no record of the transfusion. I have been able to obtain some of my medical records, but not all of them were available. This may be because St Stephen's Hospital, where I received the transfusion, was demolished and replaced by Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. My husband also believes that the organisation was in the process of changing from the Skipton Fund to the English Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS) and was short of funds as a result.
40. The only document I received, related to what had happened to me regarding the rape when I was seventeen, which was a small document which has gone black with age and is unreadable. It looks like a small plaque but you can't read what it says due to its aged condition. The notes I have been able to obtain are

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all related to gynaecological problems and the medical notes from St Stephen's hospital have been lost. This hospital no longer exists.

41. One of my friends [GRO-B] and he helped me to go about applying for my medical records but they are all related to gynaecological issues and don't go back to my treatment at St Stephen's Hospital.
42. My experience of applying to the Skipton Fund was not at all good. Their attitude towards my circumstances was one of pure ignorance. Given the traumatic nature of the way in which I came to be infected, it was terrible that they never offered to meet me in person. I only ever had phone calls with them and it is not something that you want to discuss over the phone. I remember screaming at someone there over the phone at one point, they made me that frustrated.

Section 8. Other Issues

43. I am very anxious about the potential stigma that I may face if people in my life find out about my HCV. Even though I have now been cured of the infection itself, I have asked [GRO-B] to keep it to himself and only a few of my very close friends are aware that I had hepatitis. Therefore, I wish for my statement to remain anonymous.
44. The hospital told me about the Hepatitis C Trust and it was the Hepatitis C Trust who put me in touch with the Inquiry.
45. [GRO-B] and I often see people in the community at the Kobler Clinic. I worry that she may have had access to my medical notes and have read them. This can cause tremendous worry and I am terribly anxious about what people may think if they found out I had been infected with HCV. I therefore wish to give my statement anonymously as I wouldn't be happy with people finding out that I had been infected with HCV.
46. I haven't relapsed, in terms of my mental health issues, for over three years and feel like I am happy with my lot in life. However, being rejected by the

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Skipton Fund and not receiving the compensation I am entitled to felt like a massive slap in the face. On top of that, they were completely insensitive to the circumstances of my case.

47. Giving my statement to the Inquiry has been a helpful experience.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated

13-11-2020