

ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No: WITN5226001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 24 November 2021

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 22 October 2021.

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

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B. My date of birth is GRO-B 1950. I am 71 years old. My address is GRO-B Bristol, GRO-B I have been married to my husband GRO-B since GRO-B before which we were together for eight years. Together, we have one daughter who is 31. I also have a stepdaughter from my husband's first marriage, aged 46. She has two children, aged 21 and 17.
2. For a few years, I was a social worker. Since 2006, I taught English, mainly to refugees and asylum seekers. I retired in 2016. Before Covid,

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I continued to teach on a voluntary basis. I have also been a part-time Potter for twenty years.

3. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C (HCV). I am unsure as to the source of my infection, although I will discuss the possible routes of transmission in **Section 2**. In particular, I will discuss some of the difficulties I have experienced in obtaining treatment and the impact the virus has had on my health and wellbeing.
4. I can confirm that I have chosen not to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. For personal reasons my family and I are seeking anonymity.
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.
7. I can confirm that I have provided my statement without access to my medical records. However, I intend to obtain my records, particularly during the period of time in which I believe I was infected with HCV, in order to shed light on the possible source of infection.

Section 2. How Infected

8. In 2014 or 2015, because of my age, I contacted my doctor's surgery at GRO-B in Bristol for a general health 'MOT'. The address is GRO-B Bristo GRO-B. As a result of my enquiry, blood tests were undertaken.

9. Shortly after, I received a call from the surgery. I happened to be driving in the car with my daughter and so I pulled over. A female from the surgery, the name of whom I cannot recall, told me that I had tested positive for HCV and would need to arrange a follow-up appointment. I do not remember any preamble and no support was offered at the time. I probably took the call on speaker phone and so my daughter would have learnt of my diagnosis at the same time.
10. I have been asked if I know my genotype, the answer is no but I am in the process of finding out and I will let you know.
11. I do not have any tattoos. My piercings were done professionally. I have never been an IV drug user. I have been happily married to my husband [GRO-B] since [GRO-B] and together for several years prior to that. Therefore, there are no conceivable ways in which I could have been infected in my personal life. Upon reflection, there are four possible routes of transmission which I will go on to discuss;
12. In the mid 1970s', when I was in my mid-twenties, I was travelling around Greece. On one occasion, I donated my blood in Athens in order to use the money to fund my further travels. I don't remember much about the environment in which I donated blood nor if the needles used were sterilised.
13. The second possible route of transmission may have occurred when I developed a leg ulcer when in Greece. In 1976, I acquired a mere scratch on the leg which developed into a deep, open ulcerous wound. I went to hospital in Crete, where I stayed for a few days. I do not know what, if any procedures were undertaken, but the ulcer was not cured.
14. A friend then took me to the main hospital in Athens where I was seen by a consultant. I didn't speak any Greek at the time and so my friend translated the consultation for me. My friend started crying, as

apparently the consultant said that I may have to have my leg amputated from the knee down.

15. Fortunately, my parents sent funds and I was flown home to Sheffield where my parents lived. I went to hospital in Sheffield for an assessment. They took a swab of the ulcer. I was prescribed antibiotic powder which cleared the wound. I was not admitted into hospital and was free to leave following the assessment and prescription of antibiotics. My leg is still scarred from the ulcer.
16. My daughter was born on GRO-B 1990 by emergency Caesarean at Southmead Hospital in Bristol. I am not aware if I received any blood during this procedure. I had an epidural, so I was awake during the birth. I was probably in Hospital for five days to a week. My daughter was in the special baby unit for two weeks as she was premature.
17. I believe that I was in Hospital for a mixture of reasons; both for my own health and for that of my daughter's. Again, it is possible that I acquired HCV during this period, although I would need to request my medical records to gain further clarity on this.
18. The only other time in which I believe that I could have contracted HCV was during a termination of pregnancy in 1988 at Southmead Hospital. I am not aware if I received any blood during this procedure. However, I believe that I was merely given a tablet. As there were no invasive procedures, the likelihood that I received intravenous blood in this instance was probably remote.
19. Shortly after my diagnosis, I had a face to face appointment with Dr GRO-B. She advised that I research the virus on the NHS website and that I do not become overwhelmed with the diagnosis. She was very supportive, sympathetic and caring. She queried me on my medical history in order to gain a perspective on the possible source of the

infection. However, from memory she made no comment as to the potential source.

20. I was referred to the hepatology clinic at the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI). The treatment I received depended on which nurse undertook the consultation. The first nurse didn't have a particularly good bedside manner. He was very thorough and clinical. He outlined the possible future plans regarding treatments but was not overly supportive in an emotional sense. Subsequently, I was seen by a female nurse, Margaret Allen. She was empathic, sympathetic and caring. It makes me emotional to reflect on this time.

21. Before Covid, I was monitored every six months at the hepatology clinic, where I had a scan and blood tests. I have had several fibro scans on my liver. When I was first examined, I believe my liver function tests revealed a score of approximately 8, which then increased suddenly over some months. I have been told that I have liver scarring and mild cirrhosis. I do not know the current condition of my liver.

22. GRO-B and my daughter had blood tests to check that I hadn't unwittingly transmitted the virus to them in all the years that I was infected without my knowledge. Fortunately, the results were negative. GRO-B was keen to receive his results but fortunately is not the worrying type. My daughter was also more concerned for me than herself.

Section 3. Other Infections

23. As far as I am aware, I have not been infected with any viruses other than HCV. I was tested for HIV which was negative.

Section 4. Consent

24. I consented to donating blood in Greece. I also consented to the termination of my pregnancy and to the Caesarean Section I underwent during the birth of my daughter. I was never warned of any risks attached to the blood or blood products that I was possibly given. I consented to the treatment I received for HCV.

Section 5. Impact

25. I was very shocked and upset to learn of my infection. I didn't know much about HCV at the time and had to research the virus on the Internet. As I was driving when I was informed, my daughter learnt of my diagnosis at the same time. She would have been very upset on my behalf. She is an incredibly supportive young woman. Luckily, I also have a very supportive husband, who looked out for me during this time.

26. Over the years, as far as I am aware, I did not experience any symptoms of the virus. I have felt fatigue from time to time but have merely attributed this to getting older. I have a healthy diet which could have mitigated the damaging effects of the virus. Instinctively, after I was diagnosed, I stopped eating pork products. It felt to be the right thing to do.

27. For several months I had been experiencing a problem with my bladder, which resulted in frequent visits to the toilet during the night. I went to see a GP at the surgery. I cannot remember the doctor's name. She prescribed some medication, the name of which I cannot recall. I took one dose before bedtime. I had seriously frightening side effects which included dizziness and nausea. I could hardly move and felt very heavy.

28. The side effects were very scary, such that I immediately discontinued the medication and returned to the GP to explain. The doctor didn't do anything nor has the condition resolved itself. Apparently, those with liver problems should not be prescribed this drug as it can exacerbate the damage. When I learnt this, I became particularly worried that my liver was in a far worse state than I had initially expected.
29. The first nurse I saw at the hepatology clinic mentioned possible treatment with Interferon and Ribavirin. However, this was not offered. From what I understand, the treatment was pretty heavy-going which may have been why it wasn't offered. I continued to go for assessments, during which time, there were discussions that NICE were authorising a new drug called Sofosbuvir. However, this wasn't made immediately available.
30. I was told that Sofosbuvir was a fairly new treatment and difficult to obtain. As it was such an expensive drug, it wasn't made available to that many people. I was made aware that the success rate was around 95 percent. As such, I would have assumed that it would have been a very good investment for the health service to prescribe the treatment to a wider birth of patients.
31. Between one of my check-ups at the BRI, within a few months, my liver function had increased dramatically. It was initially a score of between 8 and 9. I think this worried the consultant. Shortly after, it was decided that I should be considered for the new drug. There was no reason why my liver function should have increased so drastically. Nothing had changed in my lifestyle; I still drank the occasional glass of wine but not to excess.
32. My husband's recollection is that the treatment was offered selectively throughout the country and that the main driving factor treatment was provided to me was owing to a surplus of stock. I was finally prescribed Sofosbuvir in October 2016. The date is imprinted into my memory

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because I took a photo of the tablet as I was so pleased and grateful to finally embark on treatment. I was given one tablet a day for 12 weeks. I didn't experience any side effects. It was fantastic.

33. I was diagnosed in the summer of either 2014 or 2015. As I began treatment in October 2016, it was at least 16 months after my diagnosis that I was initiated onto treatment. The treatment was successful and I am now undetectable for the virus. I didn't even know that I had the virus and to my knowledge, my life has not been too adversely affected. However, I do have liver scarring and am relieved to be cleared of HCV.
34. I was aware of the stigma surrounding the virus and felt unclean. However, fortunately, I have not faced any negative reactions from medical professionals when declaring my HCV status. I declared my infection to my dentist who was absolutely fine and did not treat me any differently.
35. Before my diagnosis, I enjoyed a glass of wine. I have been given different advice from medical professionals about alcohol consumption. One nurse advised that I shouldn't drink anything. My current nurse assured me that alcohol in moderation is fine so long as my consumption does not exceed a couple of glasses over the weekend.
36. When I was diagnosed, I told my husband straight away. He was shocked and wondered where the virus could have come from. He had no clinical knowledge of the HCV nor of its consequences. However, he was a psychiatric nurse for 35 years. Because of his training, he was more astute to the emotional impact of the diagnosis. He knew it would be somewhat of a game changer for me. He just did what he always does; lovingly take care of me.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

37. As previously mentioned, the first nurse I saw at the hepatology clinic was systematic and methodical but lacked the bedside care and empathy that I would have appreciated. However, I was then seen by a second nurse, Margaret Allen who was very kind and with whom I requested to be seen on subsequent visits.

38. My husband and I were not happy with the way in which my diagnosis was delivered. I was driving with my daughter and not in the best position to receive such life-changing news. I was never offered formal counselling, albeit Dr. GRO-B was very supportive both at the time and on subsequent visits. She has since left the surgery. Nevertheless, if counselling had been offered, I am not sure I would have accepted. I am fortunate to have a very supportive husband who is also a skilled counsellor.

39. I filed a complaint to the BRI based on the difficulties I experienced in obtaining treatment. Medication for HCV was not available for at least 16 months after my diagnosis and seemed to be only selectively available throughout the country. Its eventual provision seemed to be more the result of a surplus in stock than any urgency to clear me of the virus. This is despite living with HCV for several decades and the liver cirrhosis that this caused.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

40. Neither the BRI nor my surgery mentioned that I might be eligible for financial assistance from any trust or scheme. I have never heard of the Skipton fund nor the English Infected Blood Support Scheme.

Section 8. Other issues

41. My hopes for the Inquiry would be to get the facts out into the open and to achieve justice for all those people and their families who have been so severely affected by receiving contaminated blood.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated

24/11/2021