Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No: WITN3048001
Exhibit: 0
Dated: August 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRO-B

I, GRO-B will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B. I was born on GRO-B 1953 and I live at GRO-B GRO-B. I am married to GRO-B GRO-B. When we got married he already had three children; GRO-B GRO-B, GRO-B and GRO-B. We later had two children of our own GRO-B and GRO-B, who sadly passed away in GRO-B 2014 with GRO-B related issues.

2. This impact statement is made in relation to GRO-B who was born on GRO-B GRO-B and GRO-B born on GRO-B. They were both born with haemophilia and both contracted Hepatitis C (HCV) and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) through contaminated blood products.

3. I am aware that GRO-B, GRO-B and GRO-B have also provided written statements to the Inquiry.

4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to any medical records.

Section 2. How affected

5. I married GRO-B on GRO-B and I took on his three children. I knew from early on in our relationship that GRO-B and GRO-B were haemophiliacs. Unfortunately I had a phobia about blood and used to faint at the sight of blood but fortunately I overcame that fear.

6. I understand from GRO-B that the boys first started being treated with Factor VIII concentrate in or about 1982. They had their injections initially at the GRO-B GRO-B but then GRO-B was trained to do the injections and thereafter was able to administer their treatment at home. I remember that when they were very young they did not like having the injections so I would help holding them and GRO-B would administer the treatment.

7. We found out that GRO-B and GRO-B had been infected with HIV only 2 or 3 months after we got married. It was in GRO-B 1984 and I remember clearly where I was. I was over at my friend's house and GRO-B went to a hospital appointment with the boys. When he came back he would not come in to my friends house and I realised something was massively wrong as I had never known him not come in. I do not remember how he said it, but he told me that GRO-B and GRO-B were both HIV positive. I do not remember much of what happened, but I do believe that we both cried.

8. I do not remember how I found out that boys had Hepatitis C. I think we just thought at the time "blimey, how can it get worse".

Section 3. Other Infections

9. I am not aware of GRO-B or GRO-B having any other infections.

Section 4. Consent

10. The boys had their blood taken every time they went in to the hospital. I do not remember ever being asked if they could test their blood, we took it for granted that they would always take blood from them. If we were asked then we probably did not think much of it at the time.

11. I am not aware of the boys being tested or treated for research purposes. This thought never even entered our heads.

Section 5. Impact

12. The time when we found out about the boys' infections was a very difficult time for the whole family. The boys were first diagnosed with haemophilia in April 1980 and only 10 months later their mother, GRO-B first wife GRO-B, died from GRO-B. GRO-B and I married on GRO-B and only 2 or 3 months later we found out that they were both HIV positive. It was a massive shock for us but life went on. We had to keep living and surviving.

13. GRO-B was born with GRO-B and we had a further son, GRO-B. We had five young children so there was a lot going on and GRO-B needed a lot of care. There was nothing that we could do at the time and the boys were healthy, so we just got on with life. It was rather hectic! GRO-B and GRO-B continued having their Factor VIII treatment.

14. We told the boys about their infections together in 1993. GRO-B was around 13/14 and GRO-B was 15 years old. I am not sure as to who suggested telling them, but I recall that a social worker got involved. I am not sure where she came from; either the hospital or the Haemophilia Society. It was a very difficult time for all of us. The boys took the news about their infections quite well. GRO-B and I were constantly scared that someone might find out about their infections and we certainty did not want anybody to know because of the stigma attached.

15. Nothing really changed in our lives after we initially found out about the HIV and HCV. We always attempted to be active and involved in school activities, and we were determined for them all to have as normal a childhood as possible and to have fun. GRO-B played football and cricket for the local team and GRO-B was in the sea scouts. He went on great adventure holidays every summer with them.

16. However, there was always massive cloud hanging over us. We were terrified that somebody would find out about GRO-B and GRO-B infections.

17. I feel like my job at the time was to support GRO-B in supporting the boys. I have a very logical mind, so this is how I saw I could provide support. We saw it as that; we just had to keep on living and surviving.

18. I find it very difficult to pin point the impact of the boys' infections on me because it is hard to isolate them from being a mother of young children. I remember that I found it hard living with a secret. It was hard with such a large young family. I remember GRO-B and I were always very tired, and all I wanted was not to fall asleep at 8:30 in the evening.

19. I played squash at a high level which I think saved me. I would forget about everything for 30 mins which helped me deal with all the stress. We also like being outside in the open air and in the forest which was great for the boys.

20. In 2006 GRO-B was diagnosed with non Hodgkin's lymphoma. We took him back home to live with us, so that we could care for him. The hospital where he was being treated was quite a long was way from us; the quickest we could get there was around 3 hours one way.

21. I feel like GRO-B has found it harder to live with HIV and HCV as compared to GRO-B. GRO-B and GRO-B were always more talkative and open than GRO-B. GRO-B has had many problems over the years which has involved GRO-B taking time out to travel to GRO-B where GRO-B lived to care for him. Once he had an episode when he stopped taking all the drugs he had been prescribed. We had to ring the police as we could not contact him. We went to GRO-B expecting to find his corpse. We then rang his GP who promised that he would see GRO-B as a matter of emergency, and she read the riot act to GRO-B. At that point GRO-B was not able to look after himself; this proved to be a very stressful time for the whole family.

22. We did not tell many people about the boys' infections, as we were scared of the stigma and I did find it difficult when it comes to the emotional side of things. It was hard to live with the secret. I had to always lie to friends when they asked about the boys, but at the same time I knew that it was not my secret to tell. Now they are both grown up and it is up to them as to whether they want to tell people.

23. The only people that we did tell about the boys' infections were my sister and our family dentist. We would not have volunteered to just tell people about it, particularly in GRO-B. There was one particular case we had read about, where some parents found out that a child at their children's school had HIV. The news leaked around the school; it was not nice.

24. We were informed about how the infections could spread and clearly it would not be around the tea table, so we never did anything differently when they had their friends around. However, other people would not know about how the infections are spread, so we were inclined not to tell other people about them, in order to prevent prejudice.

25. A friend of ours, who was a GP, spoke to the school to clarify how to treat blood spillage issues, so we had that covered and we felt safer.

26. This whole situation has also had an impact on GRO-B life. He is a trainee surgeon and I feel like he keeps the whole family sane. GRO-B finds it very difficult to deal with things psychologically. He often uploads emotional posts and conspiracy theories on his social media pages. It causes us great distress that we are badly affected by. GRO-B has a very lovely manner in dealing with GRO-B late night rants on the internet. It is fair to say that it is a joint effort that keeps us all afloat.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

27. When we first found out about the boys' HIV infections, GRO-B, who was a very conservative kind of person, advised us not to rush the decision about them starting their HIV treatment due to the severity of its side-effects. She told us to wait as she felt the treatments would get better. She advised us not to rush into anything new.

28. I am not sure about GRO-B treatment for Hepatitis C, as he received this when he already moved out from the family home.

29. GRO-B had his Interferon treatment in 2006. This was after he returned back from university and moved back in with us.

30. We only had a social worker when the boys were told about their infections, but other than that we were not offered any counselling. I guess we were given the social worker because it was a big decision to tell the boys about their infections.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

31. We were a part of the 1991 HIV litigation. I believe that we had to sign a waiver, in order for the boys to receive compensation but I cannot remember as GRO-B dealt with this.

Section 8. Other Issues

32. It is clear that people made the wrong decisions which led to this tragic consequence. They should therefore be held accountable for them.

Anonymity, disclosure and redaction

33. I confirm that I do wish to apply for anonymity and that I understand this statement will be published and disclosed as part of the Inquiry.

34. I do not wish to be called to give oral evidence.

Statement of Truth

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

Signe GRO-B

Dated.....11 September 2019