

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No: WITN4345001

Exhibits:

Dated: X

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 5 June 2020.

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B and I reside in GRO-B Shropshire. My date of birth is GRO-B 1960. I grew up in Birmingham, but have lived in GRO-B since 1982. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C (HCV) from a blood transfusion.
2. My current occupation is a Mechanical Fitter for GRO-B I started in that role in 1997 as a contractor and left in 2007. I then moved to another engineering firm, then re-joined GRO-B in 2012.
3. I have been married to my wife, GRO-B for GRO-B years. GRO-B is a retired nurse, who now works in holistic therapy. We have two grown up children who no longer live at home – a son, who is 32, and a daughter, who is 28.
4. I have been a keen motorcyclist ever since I was a child.

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5. As I have not informed a lot of people about my HCV infection, other than my immediate family, I can confirm that I am seeking anonymity with respect to my witness statement.

Section 2: How Infected

6. On 4 January 1980 I was in a motorcycle accident and was taken to Birmingham General Hospital. I am unable to remember the names of any of the doctors that treated me and I do not have the medical records. I have only recently destroyed the records which I had retained over all these years.
7. Following my accident I was in hospital for seven days. I hadn't got so much as a bruise from the accident, but I was in so much pain that I was 'screaming the place down'. The doctors filled me with painkillers and a surgeon conducted emergency surgery to find the source of my pain.
8. The surgeon went in through my stomach and put his fingers under my left kidney, which effectively ran through his fingers as it was destroyed to that extent. In the accident I had flown through the air as I came off my bike and curled up into a ball, smashing my elbow into my kidney and rupturing it as I landed.
9. The surgeon removed my left kidney. When I woke up from the surgery I had tubes coming from my body and the doctors informed me that I had needed a blood transfusion during the operation. With my kidney smashed, I was poisoning my own blood stream and the transfusion was needed to flush it all out.
10. The advice I had from the doctors following my surgery was to take it easy and don't do anything daft as I had needed stitches.
11. Nothing further was said about the blood transfusion – there was no mention of the likelihood of any infection by the doctors at the time.
12. Personally, I don't think that I should have been given the blood they were buying from American prisons and weren't checking it for viruses. I found all this out after I was diagnosed with hepatitis C. If I didn't have the blood I would have died, but equally I feel they knew they were giving me contaminated blood.
13. I was not given any information about the risk of contaminating other people until I was diagnosed with hepatitis C. As GRO-B is a nurse, we looked into it all quite thoroughly and knew what precautions to take.

Section 3: Other infections

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14. Other than hepatitis C, I did not get any other infections as a result of the transfusion. I do not know whether I was tested for anything else.
15. GRO-B explained my situation to her GP and she was given a test for HCV. She was told that if her test came back negative, which it did, the children would not need to be tested.

Section 4: Consent

16. I was unconscious during the surgery so I was not aware of what had happened until I came around and was, therefore, unable to consent.
17. I think the surgeon was very matter of fact about the operation, what he had discovered and what he had done to put it right.

Section 5: Impact

18. I am unable to remember the exact year of my diagnosis, but it would have been around 2003 or 2004.
19. I was involved in motorbike racing and as part of the entry requirements you have to wear a tag with your blood type on it. My workplace used to run a programme with a blood bank, where you could donate blood during working hours. I thought I'd go to donate blood and then I'd also be able to find out my blood type for the racing.
20. About a week after I gave my blood, I received a letter. It stated that my blood could not be used as my donation had been tested for HCV and the result was positive. The letter said someone would be in contact to arrange an appointment.
21. I had to travel to Liverpool for an appointment at the Blood Donor Centre office. I was interviewed by a doctor about my motorbike accident in 1980 and asked loads of other questions about my lifestyle. This was the first time I learnt that blood transfusions posed a risk of transmitting infections.
22. As a young man, I was involved in a biker gang and drugs were involved. As soon as I mentioned this during the interview in Liverpool, the doctor's attitude changed straight away. At first, he helped me make the link between the transfusion and my HCV, but when I mentioned my previous drug use, he immediately said that the infection came from sharing needles.

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23. I explained to him that, when I had used drugs, I never shared needles and nobody in the group that I was involved with ever got any disease or infection. I injected heroin for around a year between 1982 and 1983.
24. I recall the media attention that surrounded HIV/AIDS around that time. There were so many rumours about it and uncertainty as to how it was transmitted. This was a factor which dissuaded us as a group from sharing our needles and as a result it was something that wasn't done.
25. **GRO-B** was also interviewed in Liverpool, but separately from me. We were both asked general questions about our health. Then we were interviewed together about my medical history. At points, it was clear that they were alluding to the possibility of me having had homosexual relationships.
26. I remember the doctor at that time telling me that his recommendation would swing the outcome of my Skipton Fund application.
27. I wasn't told anything about the future treatment of my infection. I later received a letter asking me to attend Queen Elizabeth (QE) Hospital in Birmingham to have my blood checked.
28. At some point, I was given a couple of leaflets – I gave them a read and just got on with life. I remember being told to reduce my alcohol consumption and that I wouldn't be able to donate blood again.
29. In the 24-year period between the motorcycle accident and my diagnosis with HCV, I didn't experience any adverse symptoms at all.
30. When I was first told of my HCV diagnosis, I felt as though I was living with a death sentence. I was really gutted – I went into myself and withdrew from my friends and our social life.
31. I didn't tell anyone apart from my immediate family. As well as withdrawing from my friends and social life, I began to drink heavily. I was basically depressed and was living with the fear that all the symptoms would suddenly appear and my work colleagues would find out. I recall one of the doctors at the Queen Elizabeth hospital advising me not to tell anyone at work of my HCV status.
32. I became sensitive about small things like cutting myself. Even the way that **GRO-B** stacked the knives in the kitchen would irritate me. The depression I experienced left

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me fearing that one day I would wake with all the symptoms of HCV. As up to then I had not experienced any.

33. The practical impact was that my family all used separate towels. As previously mentioned, my wife is a nurse and so she was used to conducting infection control every day at work.
34. I don't believe the children were too impacted. I was very grateful that I hadn't passed it on. My son knew not to use my shaving kit and there would be huge rows if he ever did.
35. I was very worried about my employer finding out about my infection. There was a real possibility that I would lose my job if they did. It wasn't a possibility – it would have been a certainty. I also had a constant fear that I would contaminate the food at work.
36. I was actually a contractor at GRO-B and they kept promising that they would take me on the books; full-time employees were paid more and had increased benefits. But when a permanent contract didn't materialise I left GRO-B and went into fabrication and steel work.
37. I believe that my HCV held me back in terms of my career. I continued to work for less money rather than pursue promotion or permanent roles. My fabrication work was mainly undertaken as a contractor, but I was eventually taken on an employee.
38. In GRO-B 2012, I had just arranged my father's funeral. My previous supervisor at GRO-B invited me to come back as a contractor on the basis that I would then be put on the books as an employee.
39. Management at GRO-B had changed by this time. The machines were particularly unique and a speciality of mine. You couldn't just order new bits for them and so they needed my skills. Part of the deal was that I would get all the same benefits as full time GRO-B staff. If I had told them that I had HCV, I would not have got my job back.
40. When I returned to GRO-B my HCV infection was constantly at the forefront of my mind. I felt that people were always looking at me, wondering why I was so over the top about safety and why I would never let the first aiders assist me if I did receive an injury. I didn't want to put anyone else at risk. I was stressed out about this all the time.

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41. I felt that the doctors treating me at QE Hospital in Birmingham were really not interested. Their attitude was, "Ok, you've got HCV, you come in every 12 months, but you are never guaranteed treatment."
42. I informed my dentist about my HCV. I did feel conscious about the extra precautions that they put in place and it did feel very different to before – but I appreciate that this could just be me feeling this way.
43. I recall an occasion when I cut myself badly at work and needed to go to a hospital in **GRO-B** for stitches. I know that whilst at work the fear of cutting myself was always at the forefront of my mind and a constant cause of anxiety.
44. I didn't know anyone else with HCV. I chose not to join or contact any of the help groups. I believe that if you have a hepatitis problem, you are treated differently – you are looked upon in the same light as people with HIV.

Section 6: Treatment Care/Support.

45. My first doctor's appointment would have been roughly a year after my initial interview in Liverpool. I was informed that there was no treatment suitable for my HCV. There was a treatment available but it was being used to treat people that were suffering a lot more than me. I was told it was an expensive treatment and I recall a nurse telling me that the hospital was only given so much money to treat HCV patients.
46. **GRO-B** looked into the treatment and found out that Interferon was a drug with particularly terrible side effects.
47. The doctor said that, because I had been infected with HCV for so long, they couldn't understand how I wasn't suffering. The treatment was being prioritised for those who were suffering the most, so I had to wait. They didn't tell me if, or when I would be eligible for treatment, but as things stood, I wouldn't be getting any.
48. I was obviously annoyed by this, but resigned myself to the situation.
49. **GRO-B** didn't attend all of my appointments with me, but had looked into HCV and knew of the consequences of the infection.
50. I had a liver biopsy in Shrewsbury Hospital, where I stayed for about three days. I remember it being extremely painful and it essentially crippled me. Following the

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procedure, I was put in a ward across the road. I was initially transported back and forth to the main hospital each day by wheelchair but being rolled over the paving stones was complete agony. Eventually, they had to transport me by ambulance between the hospital and the ward instead.

51. Every year, I attended the QE Hospital in Birmingham. Every time I went, I would give five or six vials of blood. I was not experiencing any physical effects of my HCV infection. I was not given any updates as to the progression of the infection.
52. About five or six years ago, completely out of the blue, I was told that I was eligible for treatment and given a course of tablets. I believe this was around the time that this Infected Blood Inquiry was being talked about. Funds suddenly became available. It is my view the government wanted as many people as possible cured to get them off their backs.
53. I went in for my normal appointment and was told that funds had become available and I was eligible for treatment. I thought it was quite strange, but I wasn't in a position to say no.
54. I can't recall the name of the medication, but I remember that it was a course of tablets that I had to take for about eight weeks. The side effects included stomach cramps and mood swings – the treatment made me argumentative and caused a few rows. My son was still living at home at this point. The side effects lasted for quite a while and the treatment was really not pleasant.
55. I was tested three months after this course of treatment, and again at six months. I was informed I was clear of the infection. I haven't been asked to attend again since and I have never had a follow up appointment.
56. I remember the doctors saying that, considering I had HCV, my liver was in a good state. It had declined but not as badly as they initially thought. It does have some scarring, but I have not developed cirrhosis.

Section 8: Financial assistance

57. I initially thought that I was informed about the Skipton Fund during the initial interview I had in Liverpool, but my wife seems to think that it wasn't until I attended the hospital in Shrewsbury. It was around 2004.

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58. I filled in the Skipton Fund application form with the assistance of my wife. A nurse at the hospital in Shrewsbury also helped us complete the application and she was very supportive.
59. My application was rejected on the basis that there was a lack of supporting evidence that blood products had been administered during hospitalisation in 1980 and I had for a very short while used drugs. There was a letter to confirm that medical records at the hospital had been destroyed prior to this application.
60. One of the doctors at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham asked me how I got on with the application process. I told him the outcome and he said that I should appeal as it wasn't the correct decision.
61. A year or two after the initial application, I appealed the original decision. It was again rejected. This time on the drugs ground alone. I haven't subsequently given any thought to applying again.
62. Other than the above, I have not made any other applications for financial support.

Section 9: Other issues

63. I don't recall seeing anything in the news about the contaminated blood scandal before the inquiries began. I was aware that the NHS was buying blood from abroad and they wanted to point the finger at someone to justify the problem.
64. I think the previous inquiries were undertaken on the cheap and not properly funded. They simply sought to brush the issue under the carpet. The government wanted to be seen to be doing something and persuade those infected that they were doing something about it.
65. I would like to see help being given to the people that are suffering and encourage the government to be honest about what has happened.

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true

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Signed

GRO-B

Dated

23-3-22