ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No.: WITN0748001
Exhibits: WITN0748002 -
WITN0748011
Dated: 15/5/19

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 1 February 2019.

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

Section 1: Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B My date of birth is GRO-B 1948 and my address is GRO-B County Down, Northern Ireland GRO-B. I am married to GRO-B and together we have five children. Before my early retirement, I taught English and History to adults who were returning to study in college.

2. I intend to speak about my infection with contaminated blood. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

3. I confirm that I have chosen not to be legally represented and that I am happy for the Inquiry team to assist me with my statement.

Section 2: How Infected

4. I was infected with contaminated blood from transfusions I received for internal bleeding ulcers at GRO-B. I had six transfusions in total.

5. During my first hospital visit, I received six units of blood on 8 February 1984 [WITN0748002] and a further two on 10 February 1984 [WITN0748003]. During my second hospital visit, I received two units on 19 July 1986 [WITN0748004] and a further three units of blood on 20 July 1986 [WITN0748005]. I received four units of blood during my fifth transfusion on 27 October 1990 [WITN0748006], and a further three units of blood on 31 October 1990 during my sixth transfusion [WITN0748007]. I do not know which of these transfusions was contaminated.

6. Prior to my operations I was not told of any risks.

7. I cannot confirm what the blood was infected with, as I still do not know myself.

8. I know the blood was contaminated because I was informed about it by a doctor from the GRO-D and I believe this happened sometime between the mid 1980s and early 1990s. My feeling is that it was after the transfusions I received in October 1990. I cannot remember the exact date.

9. The doctor came to my home and introduced himself. He told me he had been sent out to visit patients who may have recently received contaminated blood to inform them of the news and to check on their well-being. He told me that the blood donor for my transfusion had some form of hepatitis or liver disease.

10. When asked how I felt, I told the doctor that I was feeling fine and in good health. I said that I was thankful for the blood I had got. I felt in no way afraid as he assured me that his visit was purely precautionary and I was in all

probability not going to be affected by the contamination. He left wishing me all the best.

11. He did not leave his number, nor did he suggest any further tests. He did not give me his card so that I could contact him if I developed any symptoms. He did not tell me what the blood was infected with and he did not give me any information to help me managing the infection and the risk of transmitting it to others. So, I kind of just forgot about it and got on with my life.

12. However, as the weeks and months went on I started to experience terrible fatigue. When in June 1991 I was informed that I had a liver virus I felt relieved that my tiredness had a cause and so I relaxed and waited for things to improve. In later years when the fatigue was still present, I remembered the visit from the doctor asking about my transfusions and, in an effort to find out what was wrong with me, in 1998 I contacted GRO-D I asked whether they could tell me when I received the contaminated blood and what it was contaminated with.

13. The tone of the letters is what really got me at the time. I exhibit the first letter I received from GRO-D in March 1999 [WITN0748008]. The letter was gentle and polite: they seemed willing to help me. By April, the tone completely changed. The letter says: "It appears that GRO-D cannot in fact assist you further and you should pursue this matter with your GP... Any further enquiries with reference to your medical condition should be made to me by your GP..." [WITN0748009]. They essentially told me to go via my doctor and to buzz off.

14. When I called, GRO-D told me that they had never sent any doctors and that no one would have come to my door. My GP wrote to them on 23 April 1999 but never got any response [WITN0748010]. At that stage I was in another bout of tiredness and I couldn't be bothered to continue fighting for information from GRO-D

15. Interestingly though, in the 23 April 1999 letter my GP states that he had checked my hepatitis C status that day. However, I have recently asked my GP to find the results of that test and there is no record of it ever happening.

Section 3: Other Infections

16. I still do not know what I was infected with so I cannot say whether I am multiply infected.

Section 4: Consent

17. To the best of my knowledge, I wasn't tested or treated without my knowledge or consent.

Section 5: Impact

18. The infection has had a huge impact on me, both physically and mentally.

19. In terms of mental impacts, I was stressed out because of the fatigue. When I was in a bad condition, I was totally fed up with life. My personality changed and I had mood swings. I wanted to do things but I could not do them because I was too exhausted, so I would get down on it and just stop talking. I remember days spent lying on the sofa looking outside at the bright blue sky or going to bed on a summer's evening at 7pm and just thinking this isn't me: I'm an active person - I have to be busy. I don't sit down and do nothing. There was a friend of mine, who lived up in Derry; I would often go up to visit him just to change environment and to give GRO-B a break. That always helped to lift the weight of the fatigue and from getting depressed.

20. In terms of physical impacts, I was exhausted. I could barely walk and at one stage I had to use walking sticks. I used to say a toddler would have been faster than me. There was nothing else particularly alarming, just that I had this fatigue and my colour was terrible (I was a grey/white colour). I did not lose or gain any weight, and I didn't really have any other physical symptoms.

21. I started going to my GP to try and figure out what was wrong with me. I told my GP what the doctor from NIBTS told me, when he came to my house, so my GP decided to run some tests. He told me that there was nothing physically wrong with me. I had fillings with mercury in, so I went to get them taken out thinking that they were the cause of the chronic fatigue. When nothing changed, the GP told me that I had depression. At one point GRO-B went down to the practice to tell the GP that I was not depressed and that there had to be something seriously wrong with me, that this was not me. The GP responded with the same answers.

22. I ended up paying to have my blood tested privately by a haematologist in June 1991 because my GP was not getting to the bottom of it. But at that time, I was only checked for hepatitis A and B, and both were negative [WITN0748011].

23. After the tests, the haematologist told me that I had a liver virus. He said I could not cure it, that it would lie dormant and would come and go on its own volition, and may go away in its own time. When I asked why my GP had not found that, he told me that the blood test Dr Atkenson had done was much more in-depth. The news gave me some relief as before that, I believed I had some life-threatening illness, and I was glad that I could tell my GP that I had something and that it was not all in my head.

24. I thought I could just get on with my life. However, to this day, I have to ask GRO-B to slow up because I cannot keep up with her. This is until the fatigue goes away, and then everything is fine. It has been up and down, continuously up and down. I have never had any follow up about the liver virus - nobody did that, not even my GP after I told him. That could be my fault though, as I didn't go pursuing it but nobody ever helped me to understand how the situation is.

25. I am not aware of any further medical complications or conditions that have resulted from the infection.

26. I have not received any treatments as I still do not know what the blood I received was infected with.

27. In terms of the impact on my family and social life, I didn't get to spend time with my children, I couldn't even enjoy them growing up. Some days I'd be in bed all day and it didn't matter how much sleep I got, I just couldn't get up. We would arrange to go out with friends, but I'd often have to cancel because I couldn't get up from bed. So, I'd tell GRO-B and my friends to carry on without me, to crack on and enjoy the night. Now we've learnt to tell friends that we'd love to come but that we'll just have to see on the day.

28. I haven't really talked about contaminated blood with anyone else but GRO-B and a few very close friends so, I've never encountered any stigma.

29. The educational effects were big. I had to give up my Masters in Irish Studies (History and Literature) which I was doing part-time alongside my work. My professors gave me a year of respite but eventually I took the decision to stop altogether. All of the personal satisfaction I got out of it seemed futile. I thought, "to hell with it, I'm not going to be able to teach any of this anyway" because I wasn't sure I could keep on working. I ended up getting a diploma in Irish Studies rather than a Master Degree.

30. Following the advice that my GP gave me, I retired when I was 48. I fought the fatigue and his advice for some time but eventually, in July 1997, I gave in. I had had a double bypass in July 1996: the surgery had gone well but the constant tiredness came back and the GP was concerned about my health. Some days I would have to rush home to lie down just to make it to the end of the day, which often finished at half past nine. I wanted to give my students security and continuity - I didn't want to let them down - so I would keep going. I started taking a few days off here and there, but towards the end it was a few weeks, until eventually I couldn't do it anymore.

31. In terms of financial effects, things were not easy because I had to retire early. I got a partial pension because I retired from ill health and I also got an

incapacity benefit. My monthly pension would have been about 40% of my old salary but at this time my health meant more than money. However, it has been tough at times. We put our children through university as best as we could but eventually I couldn't help them with the fees so they had to take out loans which they are still paying off.

Section 6: Treatment/Care/Support

32. It's hard to say if I've had difficulty accessing medical treatment, because I didn't go seeking any treatment.

33. The haematologist had told me that there was nothing I could do, so I didn't take it any further. It has been difficult to get medical answers though: getting my records was a real struggle. A friend suggested I get a solicitor, but I certainly was not going to waste any money on fighting NIBTS: we had children to raise.

34. After I was told that the blood was contaminated nobody ever offered me any counselling or psychological support.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

35. I have never received or sought financial support as I still do not know what I was infected with.

Section 8: Other Issues

36. I want the Inquiry to find answers.

37. I want someone to tell me what my donor's blood was infected with. I want to know when the infected blood was given to me and what has happened to all the other people who have received infected blood.

38. I want to know how many other people have encountered the same treatment as me. I want to know how it has impacted their lives. I want someone to believe me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-B

Dated 15/5/19