Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No: WITN7221001
Dated: 7 October 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRO-B

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 12 December 2018. I adopt the paragraph numbering in the Rule 9 request for ease of reference.

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

1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B. My date of birth is GRO-B and my address is known to the Inquiry.

2. I intend to speak about my diagnosis and how I was infected with Hepatitis C, which I believe I contracted through being given a blood transfusion following an emergency caesarean section on GRO-B In particular, I wish to comment on the impact this diagnosis had on me personally but also on my family.

3. I have been married for GRO-B years and my husband and I live in GRO-B. I have an adult son from a previous relationship and my husband has an adult

son and daughter from a previous relationship. I have worked at a GRO-B GRO-B as a GRO-B for the las GRO-B years.

2. How Infected

1. On GRO-B, I was given a blood transfusion at GRO-B following an emergency caesarean section during the birth of my son. I was given two units of blood, and this is how I was infected with Hepatitis C.

2. I do not recall being provided with any information or advice in relation to the risks of being exposed to infection through a blood transfusion. It was an emergency blood transfusion, and I only remember quickly signing a consent form.

3. My son was born GRO-B weeks premature, so I remained in GRO-B Hospital for around a week following the birth. I was then transferred to GRO-B Hospital for a further four to five days. I do not remember the names of any medical staff who treated me.

4. In around GRO-B I went to a street blood bank van in GRO-B to donate blood. During this visit, I remember being asked if I had ever had a blood transfusion. Sometime later, I received a letter from the blood donation service which bluntly told me that I had contracted Hepatitis C. The letter also enclosed a leaflet which outlined what Hepatitis C was, that there was no treatment, that I had a 50/50 chance of getting cirrhosis within 20 years, and to contact my GP as soon as possible.

5. I was absolutely devastated to be told that I had been infected with Hepatitis C and that there was no treatment, via a bluntly worded letter. I thought that I was going to die. I am sure that the news could have been given to me in a more sensitive manner, such as informing me that there was an abnormality and to contact my GP for further tests.

6. I promptly arranged a GP appointment following receipt of the letter. My GP was horrified by the way I had been informed of the infection. My GP immediately referred me to a consultant at GRO-B Hospital, who explained what Hepatitis C was, how it could affect my liver, how it was transmitted and what precautions I should take to prevent transmission. My husband attended all the hospital appointments with me.

7. I remember being told that it was highly unlikely that I had given Hepatitis C to my family, but I was told not to share toothbrushes, razors etc. I felt like this information had come too late as I was GRO-B years into being infected by this point.

8. My GP and consultant were wonderful and handled my hospital visits sensitively. I felt that I was well informed on the infection and the potential impact on me. However, I do recall an incident where I was having blood taken in hospital and a nurse indiscreetly said to her colleague something like “put gloves on for this one over here” and I felt so embarrassed as everyone in that room must have heard.

9. As a recipient of a blood transfusion during that period, I believe that I should have been given information earlier on the possibility that I may have contracted Hepatitis C. I should have been contacted by the hospital as soon as it was known that blood transfusions were infecting people so that I could be tested for Hepatitis C, as well as for other infections.

3. Other Infections

1. I believe that I also contracted the Herpes virus as a result of the blood transfusion. It has had a major impact on my wellbeing. The discomfort and embarrassment were very stressful. The outbreaks were very inconvenient, especially on my honeymoon, and there was always a risk that I may pass it on to my husband. I did not realise what it was at first, but I now receive treatment from my GP.

2. I also believe that my dental problems may be linked to the blood transfusion. I have developed a severe gum infection called Periodontitis, which resulted in me losing half my teeth.

4. Consent

1. I do not think that I was ever tested without my knowledge or consent, but I do not think I was told about the risk of infection from a blood transfusion.

5. Impact

1. I have been treated and tested as part of a research project for Hepatitis C at GRO-B Hospital. My consultant told me that there was a drug trial and asked if I would like to take part in it. As part of the trial, I had a liver biopsy which was a very unpleasant experience. I also tested for HIV and awaiting the results were some of the longest days of my life. I was paranoid that I was going to test positive, and I was worried about who would look after my son if I died. I was also worried that I may have passed it on to my husband. However, my results thankfully came back as negative.

2. I initially took part in a 12-month programme. As part of the programme, I was required to self-inject Interferon 3 times a week in my thigh. I was also required to have monthly blood tests and health check-ups at hospital.

3. There were several side effects to the Interferon injections, including hair loss, weight loss, depression, fatigue, and a horrible taste in my mouth. I constantly looked ill, and I was frightened that someone would see me at hospital each month.

4. At the end of the 12-month programme, I tested negative for Hepatitis C, and I was ecstatic with the results. However, I went to see the consultant a month later, full of smiles, only to be sat down with my husband and told how sorry he was, but I had tested positive again. I sat in a daze as the consultant told me the news, trying hard not to cry. I remember vaguely hearing his voice in the

background telling me not to give up and there was another programme I could take part in.

5. I then took part in another 12-month programme. As part of the programme, I was required to self-inject Interferon and take Ribavirin tablets. I experienced the same side effects as in the previous programme, but the depression was far worse. Some days I could not face doing the injections as my thighs were really bruised and I felt that they were a waste of time, having already completed the previous 12-month programme. My husband was wonderful during this period, and he would often do the injections when I could not face it.

6. At the end of the 12-month programme, I tested negative for Hepatitis C, but this time I did not let myself feel happy with the results. I just prayed and hoped that this time the treatment had worked. Three months later, I was still testing negative, and I was discharged from hospital treatment. I am so grateful to the consultant and his team for the care and treatment they have provided to me.

7. I had difficulties accessing the Interferon injections during the 12-month programmes. My local chemist supplied it for the first few months and then they told me to go elsewhere because they would not supply it to me. I do not know if this was linked to my Hepatitis C status, but I found it to be very strange. I was also told that I could dispose of needles at the chemist or my GP surgery, but both refused which made me feel like an outcast and that I was being judged as being a drug addict. The hospital eventually had to supply and disposed of my needles each month at my check-ups.

8. Hepatitis C has completely changed my life. It has had both a physical and mental impact on me. I find that I tire easily, and I need to rest in the afternoons after work. I live in fear that someone will discover my secret and judge me as a dirty person who takes drugs and has unprotected sex. I believe that I am not the sort of person that people would want to be associated with. I was GRO-B years old when the AIDS epidemic was at its peak in the news, and I remember the stigma associated with the condition. I just want to live a normal life.

9. Additionally, the impact of Hepatitis C has put a strain on my marriage. I found this difficult as the stress was resulting from something that happened years before I even met my husband. We were still young, and we were planning on having children together. After my diagnosis, I did not want to be intimate with him, as I felt dirty, and I was terrified of passing it on to him. I could not risk having more children for fear of passing it on to them.

10. My son and stepchildren do not know about my Hepatitis C status. During the 12-month programmes, I had to explain to them why there were needles in the house in case they thought I was a drug addict, but I have never told them why I was taking them. I have not told the children because I do not want my son to blame himself for me needing a blood transfusion when he was born.

11. My parents and husband know about my Hepatitis C status, and I have sworn them to secrecy to protect myself from social stigma. This means that they have struggled to support me because they have no one to talk to about it. Although they initially did not understand the diagnosis, the impact of me being so ill during the 12-month programmes made them realise how serious the virus could be, and they were deeply upset and concerned for me.

12. I have also recently told my sister about my Hepatitis C status, who is a GRO-B GRO-B. When I joined her practice around 3 years ago, she told me to tick "no" on the patient forms where it asks if you have Hepatitis C. However, I did not feel comfortable with this, so I ticked "yes", and she was very upset with me as I had embarrassed her and made her feel uncomfortable at her workplace.

13. Additionally, Hepatitis C has also had an impact on my social life. I have lost all interest in going out and I am not able to socially drink. On the rare occasion I do have a drink, the next morning I feel so guilty for putting alcohol into my body and so I become depressed.

14. During the 12-month programmes, holidays abroad caused me distress as I had to get doctors' letters explaining what the needles and medication were for in order to take them onto planes.

15. I work at a GRO-B as a GRO-B, so I have to keep very quiet about my Hepatitis C status. I believe that GRO-B would not want GRO-B GRO-B by someone with Hepatitis C. My consultant has reassured me that it cannot be transmitted that way and it is quite safe to carry on with work. However, if I cut my hand, I feel it is a major incident and I am very particular about bandaging myself. The fear of passing it on to GRO-B is aways at the back of my mind. The tiredness and fatigue symptoms also make some workdays very hard.

16. The need to keep quiet about my Hepatitis C status at work was particularly challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. I could not go into work as I was categorised as vulnerable. I had to tell my colleagues and friends that I had a low immune system to explain why I was not at work, which made me feel uncomfortable as I felt I was being dishonest.

17. I have been in the same job for GRO-B years because I am scared that I would not be able to find another job. In the GRO-B profession, it is quite normal to have medical assessments to see if you are suitable for the role. I would fail such an assessment.

6. Treatment/Care/Support

1. The fear of social stigma has previously stopped me from seeking support. A lovely nurse at GRO-B Hospital tried to start a support group for Hepatitis C patients. I was horrified at the thought of being seen attending this group and so I refused to join, which sadly I was told was the response from other patients.

2. I knew of the Liver Trust, but I lost contact with them when I moved house.

3. I am currently in touch with the Hepatitis C Trust, who are helping me to get support.

7. Financial Assistance

1. The only financial help I have received was a £20,000 payment from the Skipton Fund in 2004. I only found out about this because my GRO-B was a GRO-B GRO-B in another hospital and she happened to come across a leaflet, which she gave to me. Otherwise, I would not have known about the payment.

2. The application process for the Skipton Fund was straightforward. I was under the impression that this was a one-off payment, and I was not entitled to any other payments. This information may have been communicated to me by the Skipton Trust at the time, but I cannot remember for certain.

3. I have recently applied for the GRO-B Infected Blood Support Scheme. This application is ongoing. So far, I have found it to be a straightforward process.

8. Other Issues

1. If it had not been for the news coverage on the Infected Blood Inquiry, I would have continued to try to forget about my experience and I would still feel angry about it. Having never had support, this statement has given me a chance to voice all my fears and express what I have been through, which has been rather therapeutic. I just want to know why I was given the contaminated blood that ruined my life when the risks were widely known.

2. I do not have any specific questions that I wish to put to the inquiry or any other issues that I wish to comment on.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-B ....

Dated...07-10-22...............