

ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No: WITN7231001

Exhibits:0

Dated: November 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN 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 and I live at GRO-B
GRO-B
2. I am currently a registered carer for my mother who suffers from Alzheimer's Disease, which is both stressful and exhausting. I did not think that, at the age of GRO-B I would be living in my mother's house and caring for her.
3. I was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV) via a contaminated blood transfusion.
4. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my full medical records. I have some medical records which oddly seem to cover almost every single minor attendance, such as for warts and boils, yet are completely silent in relation to the many entries which should appear in relation to my surgery, the blood transfusion and protracted aftercare.

Section 2. How infected

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5. I was infected with HCV via a contaminated blood transfusion at the GRO-B
GRO-B in the summer of GRO-B
6. In the summer of GRO-B
GRO-B
7. I was taken to the GRO-B where I underwent a 4-hour emergency operation, a blood transfusion followed by 6 weeks of being bed bound.
8. A district nurse came in twice a week to change my dressing and I had to go back to the hospital several times to be restitched. I refused a skin graft as I had endured so much pain already.
9. My parents were not present at the hospital, so no information or advice was given to them about the risk of being exposed to infection from blood transfusions. My father was GRO-B and my mother was pretty much absent for most of my life.
10. Fast forward to GRO-B I was running a successful restaurant in GRO-B when I fell ill. I remember losing all the power in my arms which made serving wine almost impossible. I had to improvise by somehow using my body to move my left arm to push up my right arm in order to pour the wine. I was also unbelievably fatigued which I initially put down to working 80-90 hours per week and always being on my feet which I thought also accounted for the aches and pains which I was experiencing in my body.
11. However, my health continued to go downhill so I went to GRO-B in GRO-B He initially thought that I may have arthritis. I thought that I was far too young to have something like that. GRO-B but goodness it is worth it. GRO-B sent a nurse to my restaurant who took about 12 vials of blood, and I also underwent a full body x-ray in a machine which rotated 360 degrees which ruled out arthritis.

12. Shortly afterwards [GRO-B] told me that I was infected with HCV. For reasons unknown to me, [GRO-B] very much downplayed the severity of what being infected with HCV meant. He told me that he would have me back out and running in no time at all. I thought that it was a touch of jaundice which just needed a bit of sunshine. I did not think it was anything to worry about and as a result I was very open with people, including customers, about my HCV infection. This openness turned out to be one of the worst decisions of my life.

13. [GRO-B] then sent me to one of the [GRO-B] hospitals, where a consultant provided me with a CD rom of all the tests that were carried out on me. The consultant did not give me any practical advice, information on prognosis or the risk of transmission of HCV.

Section 3. Other Infections

14. Apart from HCV, I don't believe that I was infected with any other infections as a result of being given a contaminated blood transfusion.

Section 4. Consent

15. As far as I am aware, I don't believe that I was treated or tested without my knowledge, consent or without being given adequate or full information. I also don't believe that I was treated or tested for the purposes of research without my consent.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

16. I was infected with HCV in the summer of [GRO-B] although I did not find out about my infection until I fell ill in [GRO-B]. Looking back, I think I started to feel the effects of my HCV infection in my mid 30s which would have been in or around 1996.

17. At this time, I was running a [GRO-B] I remember my legs and feet swelling up and I was basically overwhelmed with exhaustion. I was doing 12-hour days at this time, so I put it down to constantly being on my feet coupled with all the usual stresses of running a business.
18. However, I am a determined person and I somehow managed to keep going but with hindsight, I can see that the HCV really took a hold of my health from 1996 onwards.
19. However, it was not until [GRO-B] when I was running my restaurant in [GRO-B] that my HCV symptoms became intolerable. I had started to suffer with terrible brain fog, was constantly fatigued and had severe pains in my body. Looking back, every day was a battle, and I don't really know how I did it for so long. [GRO-B] who I had to support so giving up was not an option.
20. Following my diagnosis in [GRO-B] I underwent a very painful liver biopsy with no anaesthetic. I would describe it as being "*excruciatingly painful*" and I remember that the male nurses literally had to hold me down for the procedure. I recall having a discussion with a female consultant in the [GRO-B] Hospital about possible Interferon treatment. She advised me that it had a 50% success rate and that I would be too poorly to continue to run my restaurant. I therefore declined treatment.
21. The worst decision I made was being open about my HCV diagnosis which came about as [GRO-B] gave me the impression that HCV was not much to worry about at the time. I was utterly naïve about the social stigma which attached to HCV. My customers started to desert me. This was a very difficult and sad time for me as I was already struggling on through ill health. I was basically treated like a leper. No one wants to eat in a restaurant where the owner and chef are HCV positive. Even my own family ran like hell when I cut myself despite the fact that I was extremely careful. I felt like I needed a sign and a bell which I could ring to tell everyone that I was clean.

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22. In fact, and rather ironically, the only person who continued to eat at my restaurant was [GRO-B]. He really supported me throughout this time although it was bittersweet as I had been so open with people as a result of what he had said to me about HCV.
23. I ended up having to close the restaurant in [GRO-B] and my family and I moved to a place called [GRO-B] which was a very quiet area. We basically needed to escape and go and hide as by then everyone knew about my HCV, and it was mentally and emotionally draining. We purchased a [GRO-B] [GRO-B] which was in need of total renovation. The restaurant had made a profit, and when we sold it [GRO-B] [GRO-B] [GRO-B] We used the wood from the forest for fuel and lived humbly. We lived in the middle of nowhere, in hiding, and life became very different for our family.
24. Following my HCV diagnosis, I had given up smoking and drinking in an attempt to become as healthy as I possibly could in order to fight the virus. This meant my social life was non-existent although my failing health and the stigma I received, had effectively, already put paid to this.
25. After about 4 or 5 years we sold the house and bought a [GRO-B]. I worked in a variety of roles here, including gardening for an old lady whose husband had died. I remember being totally exhausted; we were up at 6am as the [GRO-B] [GRO-B] My HCV was really affecting me; the pains, the fatigue and the worry that someone might find out about my diagnosis and life would then again become even more unbearable due to the stigma. I heard of others who had to give up some of the jobs that I was doing, due to them not coping with the strenuous nature of the work, and they didn't even have HCV!
26. I remember chopping wood for our wood burner whilst listening to Radio 5 Live about people taking early retirement for HCV. I remember thinking "if only". It was just not an option. I had to work to support my [GRO-B]. Sadly, I was unable to find work unless I lied about my HCV, the result being

that I was in a constant state of anxiety. This did not sit well with me but I had already experienced first-hand with my restaurant, the damaging effect of divulging to others about being infected with HCV.

27. I moved [GRO-B] due to my partner going through a midlife crisis [GRO-B] I found out about the Hepatitis C Trust and got in touch with the brilliant Samantha May. She informed me about HCV treatment and got the ball rolling in this regard. Samantha May should get an OBE.

28. I underwent a 12-week course of HCV treatment prescribed by Oxford Hospital in [GRO-B] I can't remember the name of the treatment, but it did not make me as ill as I expected it to. I felt a little more tired and anxious than usual, but I managed to complete the course with the result that the HCV was undetectable in my system.

29. When I think about HCV, it makes me feel quite depressed. You hear stories of so many people dying from it including famous people like Anita Roddick. You live with the unknown and the fear of the fact that it could kill you at any time. I never divulged my HCV infection to my partner's mother and in a lot of ways I am still living with the secret of HCV.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

30. I had an absolutely torrid time with the way in which I was treated by [GRO-B] [GRO-B] whilst trying to complete the EIBSS application form. The procedure took about 2 years, and a [GRO-B] [GRO-B] This was very upsetting and stressful. It was at this point that I was going to give up and not seek any financial support. However, I thought better of it, and I decided to approach my GP who was absolutely brilliant and filled in the form [GRO-B] [GRO-B]

31. I have never been offered any counselling or psychological support in consequence of my HCV infection. About 2 years ago I was in a very dark

place and felt that I could have really benefited from some form of psychological support. I have had to deal with the lifelong effects of HCV on top of suffering

GRO-B

32. However, when I was told that my EIBSS application had been successful it felt like there was a light at the end of the tunnel with the result that I can now provide financial help to my GRO-B and a second chance at a new life.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

33. In February 2022 I was told that my EIBSS claim had been successful. I receive the full support meaning that I receive £1,600 per month and I also received £50,000 and in October 2022 I received the £100,000 interim payment from the Government.

Section 8. Other Issues

34. I would like the Inquiry to achieve justice for everyone who has been infected and affected. If they have gone through what I have then their lives would have been difficult. I also see myself as one of the lucky ones as I was accepted by EIBSS and without this support I don't think I would be here today. I have been given a chance to have a life again.

35. I wrote to the Inquiry on 19 March 2021 setting out my frustrations and hurt in relation to how badly I was treated by the GRO-B in connection with the EIBSS application form.

Anonymity

36. I wish to apply for anonymity.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated

13 / 11 / 2022