ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No.: WITN7261001
Exhibits: Nil
Dated: X 21-12-2022

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 13 September 2022.

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B My date of birth is GRO-B 1963, and my address is known to the Inquiry.

2. I run a catering business. I am single, and I have a grown-up daughter and three grand-daughters.

3. I intend to speak about my infection with Hepatitis C ("HCV"). In particular, the nature of my illness, how it has affected me, the treatment I have received and its impact on my family and our lives together.

4. I confirm that I am not legally represented and am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement. I wish to be anonymous to protect my

privacy and that of my family, including close members who are not aware of what happened to me.

5. The Inquiry Investigator has also explained the Inquiry's statement of approach and 'Right to Reply' procedure. I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

Section 2. How Infected

6. I was 16 years old when I began to experience difficult cramps in and around my stomach region. I was always in a lot of pain around my womb and did not know what it was. Sometimes I could not go to college or do anything else because of the pain.

7. One Friday night, when I was about 19 years old, I had been in pain all day. My boyfriend was in the navy at the time, but he used to come over on weekends and we would go out. That day due to the pain and discomfort I could not physically make it. At about 10:30 pm that evening, he decided to take me to Queen's Medical centre. I was seen by a doctor at A& E department before they decided to transfer me to City Hospital in Nottingham.

8. Upon our arrival at City Hospital, I was in and out of consciousness. I remember arriving at the hospital and the staff rushing around me. my condition had become an emergency and after that I must have completely passed out.

9. By the time I came to, it was Sunday and my mum was crying at my bedside at the hospital. I also noticed a round bottle of blood hanging upside down and I had a drip from it extending into my arm. My mum would have also seen the bottle of blood, as it was there by the time I woke up.

10. The doctor explained that I had a cyst in my left ovary, which had burst. They had to carry out an emergency operation, and they removed my left ovary and fallopian tubes. They explained that the cyst had been so small for years, which is why it had not been detected earlier but it had suddenly become active thus the increased pain. I had been to the GP a few times and complained about the pain in my womb but had never been sent for further examination.

11. One of the doctors informed me that I had required a blood transfusion, among other things. I recall what was said to me clearly. I was very weak and remained in the hospital for about a week before I was discharged to go home. I was told to rest and take it easy and was off work for a month whilst the wound healed.

12. No one ever informed me about the potential risks of contracting an illness or infection due to a blood transfusion either at the time or any time afterwards.

13. Life continued as normal for a long time, and even though I experienced some of the symptoms I now know are associated with HCV, such as fatigue and irritability, I attributed these to usual life stressors.

14. When I was 40, I visited the doctor because I had not had a period in about four or five months. I had been very busy working, so I did not notice this at first.

15. My GP thought I could be experiencing the early stages of menopause and referred me to the GRO-B in Nottingham for blood tests. Following these initial tests, the doctors called me back for further rounds of blood tests. The GP stated that the results of the blood tests were abnormal but did not explain further. I didn't think much more of it. Finally, I was called to attend the surgery sometime either in late 2006 or early 2007, and one of the doctors at the surgery informed me that the results of the tests confirmed that I was HCV positive.

16. I was in shock and didn't really take it in – I sort of equated it with a sexually transmitted disease and my first thought was to consider if my first husband had played around. I had never heard of HCV before this. The doctor handed me some leaflets and gave me some information about managing the risks of transferring the infection to others and taking precautions around sexual activities.

17. I was however married to my second husband, not my father's daughter, at this time. I informed my husband of my diagnosis, but I did not tell my daughter. My daughter's father and I are not in contact, so I did not bother contacting him to inform him. It may have been suggested that my husband and daughter be tested but it wasn't something that was pushed as necessary and as far as I'm aware neither were tested.

18. Almost immediately, I was referred to Queen's Medical Centre in the Hospital to commence treatment. I understood that the person I was seeing was an HCV specialist. I had to attend the hospital every two weeks for monitoring, and I believe the treatment lasted for about two months.

19. The treatment consisted of injections which I had to get used to giving myself. They explained the potential side effects but overall, it was not a nice treatment. I generally felt poorly, weak and tired, more so than normal, just under the weather.

20. Once I finished the course of treatment, I was informed that I had cleared the HCV. A specialist nurse did provide me with information about the support services available, but I did not bother with them because I was going through a divorce and busy with plans to move to GRO-B I was elated at the news I was clear of the virus but more so, it was a feeling of relief.

21. I was never referred to have a liver biopsy or fibro-scan, so I am unaware of any impact HCV has had on my liver.

22. I have never been an intravenous drug user, and I don't have tattoos or piercings. I have never received medical treatment abroad. I have been married twice, and these were committed long-term relationships. As far as I am concerned the blood transfusion, which is the only one I have ever had was the source of my HCV infection.

Section 3. Other Infections

23. I do not believe I have received any infection other than HCV due to being given infected blood.

Section 4. Consent

24. At the time of my operation, it had been an emergency, and I passed out, so there was no chance that my consent to receive blood was sought. In any case, it was a life-or-death situation and I understand that.

25. When I was finally diagnosed with HCV, the doctor told me I was being tested for the menopause and I was not aware that I was being tested for HCV.

26. As far as I am aware, I have not been tested for HIV, and if I have been, no one has ever mentioned this to me or provided me with an outcome of the test.

Section 5. Impact

27. Following the removal of my left ovary and fallopian tube, the other ovary was left weakened. I gave birth to my daughter in November 1990, and by March 1991, I decided to be sterilised.

28. Looking back over the years, I had experienced some symptoms, but I did not know what HCV was at the time, and I did not attribute them to anything remarkable. My grandmother used to remark that my face

sometimes got darker than the rest of my body, which persisted for many years, until after I was cured of HCV. She used to ask if I was worried.

29. I believe I also experienced some pains in my liver area, which was there long before I got married, but after the treatment, I no longer experienced these. I also noticed that the white of my eyes would be yellow from time to time, and I would drink a lot of water in an attempt to flush myself through.

30. I have always been self-employed, and I am the kind of person who carries on even if I feel exhausted. I do not particularly notice if I am tired and fatigued. I can actually say that I feel tired now, but I know I have things to do, so I get on with it.

31. Following my diagnosis, I should say that I was initially concerned that it might be a life-threatening illness. It was just the unknown and the lack of real information. It makes you wonder how long you may have left.

32. I believe my diagnosis of HCV contributed to the eventual breakdown of my marriage. My husband and I had been together for 15 years but things weren't great at the time and it was the final nail in the coffin. He used it as an excuse to pull away from me and leave, and I let him.

33. Since then, I have chosen to refrain from relationships and sexual encounters, and I made the decision as soon as I found out although I am fully aware that it is very difficult to transmit in that way. Part of that celibacy is the fear that I may pass a serious illness on to someone else that by the very definition, I would care for. This persists with me even though I am aware that I have been cleared of the infection.

34. While on the treatment, I was conscious of the side effects but did not experience some of these, such as night sweats or flu like symptoms. I am by nature quite a jolly person, and try to remain upbeat. I was busy and going through a lot, so I would not have noticed if I was depressed or low in mood.

35. There was one instance when I was in court in respect of a civil case and I lost my temper at the wrong time, and I exploded, which was totally out of character for me. That episode was down to the medication I was on at the time which did cause the occasional change in my mood.

36. The doctors gave the all clear three months after I completed the treatment, and I went back for a further check-up six months later to confirm I remained clear. However, other than those appointments, I did not have any further check-ups and currently do not have any ongoing monitoring regarding HCV.

37. My daughter was born prematurely when I was only about six months pregnant, but there was no explanation for why she was born so early. Now I wonder if this was due to the HCV.

38. I have not discussed my diagnosis with anyone, even close family members. My mum passed away before I was diagnosed, so she never knew.

39. To me there is a stigma attached to HCV, and it is not something I would broadcast. I keep the details to myself to prevent any problems.

40. I feel terrible because of all the years I was unaware of it. Being infected, even though it was not my fault makes me feel dirty in a way and I am aware it is something that is associated with drug use. It is something I have carried with me all this time, and even though I know I contracted it at the hospital, it bugs me, but it is a burden I have to carry on my own, not for my family or anyone else.

41. I have wondered if there were opportunities for my diagnosis to have been picked up earlier. I was diagnosed with IBS sometime after my surgery, perhaps in the early 1990s. In 1994, I experienced a terrible flare up of IBS and was admitted into the hospital for about a week. They had to carry out blood tests on this occasion. Before the IBS diagnosis, I was in and out of the hospital as an outpatient and I had to have a few

laparoscopy procedures before that diagnosis was confirmed. Was there an opportunity missed in that period?

42. My daughter was born in 1990, and this was another opportunity that could have been taken. Surely one of the numerous blood tests taken during the procedure would show something up? I do not understand why it was not detected when I was pregnant.

43. I have never experienced any difficulties obtaining a mortgage or travel insurance.

44. I was never informed to tell the dentist or other medical professionals about my diagnosis so have never mentioned it to them.

45. On one occasion, I felt stigmatised at Queen's Medical during a visit to see doctors when I was sent downstairs to have blood tests, and the person down there was masked and fully gowned up. Nothing was said but it was awkward and this is the only place that has happened. Additionally, every time I went down to have blood taken, there were always two people there.

46. About three years ago, I went into the hospital for a problem unrelated to HCV and a medical professional mentioned that I had been treated for HCV in the past. Although I wasn't treated any differently, I went home deflated afterwards because this information is on my records for everyone to see.

47. She did not need to mention it at all, and she said it so casually. It is a medical centre, so I have no personal relationship with any of the staff members, and it wasn't borne out of familiarity.

48. I have never been a blood donor.

49. Even now that I have been cleared of HCV, and I'm relieved about that as mentioned, it still upsets me that it happened. In the back of my mind,

there also remains a concern that it could come back. It's there now as we speak.

50. I do not drink alcohol, as I was advised to avoid alcohol at the time of my diagnosis. However, even though I am now cleared, and it's like, off you go, I refuse to drink. I may have one drink on a special occasion, but I feel as though I have to protect my liver. I have seen other family members die of liver failure due to alcohol and watched them develop jaundice.

51. For the first few years following my diagnosis, I withdrew a lot from my regular social life, but I decided eventually there was nothing I could do about it, I had to carry on. After a few years, I gradually began socialising again. I live a simple life, I go to church or work then I go home.

52. I am pretty healthy in general, and I rarely feel ill. I do suffer from the occasional knee problem from time to time, but I believe this is from standing a lot and my IBS can flare up but on the whole, I do not do too badly.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

53. I may have been made aware that counselling services were available at the time of my diagnosis, but I was going through so much and having to attend several appointments so I may have not taken in the information properly. I cannot even be sure what the counselling service would have consisted of. I do not recall anything being offered during the treatment schedule.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

54. The specialist HCV nurse informed me about the Skipton Fund when I was referred for treatment, but I did not take it seriously at the time as there was so much else going on in my life. I have never received any financial support from any of the trusts and schemes previously set up.

55. However, due to recent media coverage and my engagement with this Inquiry, I am now aware that there is a financial support scheme called the English Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS). I am in the process of trying to obtain my medical records and intend to fill out the application forms to apply for support from the EIBSS.

Section 8. Other Issues

56. I am angry to a degree that something so serious as blood donations was allowed to be contaminated. I do not know whether this was because they could not be bothered to check or did not have the means to check at the time. There were many opportunities for them to test me, so I cannot understand why they missed this and let me live with an illness for decades.

57. In the future, they need to guarantee that there are processes in place to ensure that things like this don't happen again because it has a very serious impact on people's lives.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-B

Dated 21-12-2022