

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN0854001

Exhibits: WITN0854002-003

Dated:

**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 26 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 1957 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I have three elder brothers. Our father passed away from a heart attack on GRO-B 1967. Our mother, GRO-B: M passed away on GRO-B 1998. I am married and have three children of my own.
2. I intend to speak about my mother and her infection with the Hepatitis C virus, which she contracted from a blood transfusion. In particular, I intend to discuss the nature of her illness, how the illness affected her, the treatment she received and the impact it had on her and our family.

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3. The events that I detail in this statement happened a long time ago and my memory regarding precise dates has faded. The dates referred to in this statement are therefore a rough approximation on some occasions. I have also spoken to my family, in particular my brother [GRO-B] to refresh my memory about some of the events that happened leading up to my mother's death.
4. 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. The Inquiry team has explained the anonymity process to me. I have given it consideration and I would like my name to be redacted through out my statement.

### **Section 2. How Affected**

5. My brother [GRO-B] is my eldest brother. Then it is my brother [GRO-B] and finally [GRO-B]. When my father passed away in 1967, it left my mother widowed at the age of 50 with four children to look after. I was nine at the time and [GRO-B] was twelve. I remember the local minister coming to our home whilst we were watching television and I saw him try and give my mother an envelope filled with money that was collected at our Parish. My mother refused to take it and handed it back to him. She said to him "*give it to someone that needs it*". That was her, she was a resilient woman.
6. She had lovely peachy skin, thick black hair and took great care of her appearance. She had a great energy and absolutely adored her family. She always cooked fresh meals for herself and for my brothers and I. She would make a three-course meal for dinner every day and refused to cook processed food. She tried to keep healthy and ate well to help her do this.
7. As she was a proud woman, she rarely spoke to my brothers and I about her health. She would never admit she was ill unless she was really ill.

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She did not like doctors or hospitals. My brothers and I think this was probably because she worried about her blood pressure. She was terrified of it being taken and then having to take blood pressure medication. She was once prescribed such medication and it made a mess of her; she could not even lift her head. Like most of the older generation, she did not like bothering doctors.

8. At some point in 1986, I cannot recall an exact date, I was out for the night and phoned home to see how my mother was. I was told that she had been taken to hospital. I think it must have been [GRO-B] who took her to hospital, although I cannot quite remember how she got there. She must have been feeling very unwell for her to be in hospital. I think she had been vomiting. She was admitted to [GRO-B] where they performed several tests. I remember that I had to take her in fresh stew each day because she would not eat the hospital food.
9. The doctors at [GRO-B] told my brothers and I that she did not have cancer and we were so relieved. However, we were told that she had had some internal bleeding and that her blood levels were low. As a result they said that she would need a blood transfusion. The doctors never told us what caused the internal bleeding or what kind of illness my mother had at that time. We were just told that she definitely did not have cancer and that she needed to have a blood transfusion.
10. My brothers and I were never told about any possible risks associated with the blood transfusion my mother received. I don't know if the doctors told my mother directly about any risks, but they definitely did not tell us.
11. In receiving the blood transfusion at [GRO-B] 6 pints sticks in my mind as the amount of blood my mother received but I cannot be certain. My mother was 68 when she had the blood transfusion. She was in [GRO-B] for about a week in total and was then sent home.
12. She was never the same after the blood transfusion and her health gradually went downhill. My brothers and I started to notice things. She



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began to have a flu or cold constantly and would brush it off as just having a little cold. She also started to get headaches and cold sores around her mouth. Of course, we did not know at that point that it was anything other than a cold. This went on for a few years.

13. Overtime, she did not like being left alone and needed someone with her every night. She started to feel nervous and felt poorly in herself which is why she did not want to be on her own. I knew she was getting older, but this felt different in some way. However, even if she was feeling diabolical, she would still always see to other people. She felt guilty as she saw other widows in the area who did not have any family but knew that she had my brothers and I and her grandchildren to keep her company.
14. As the years went by, her peachy skin started to turn orange and her eyes became bloodshot before turning a green/yellow colour. Her neck became wrinkled and she was constantly cold. My brothers and I tried to call the doctor out to see her several times but she would have none of it. One time GRO-B called my mother's GP, Dr GRO-B to check in on her. She threw him out of the house and refused to see him.
15. Eventually, she went back to hospital in 1997. I cannot remember the exact reason why she went to hospital. All I knew was that she was beginning to have trouble going to the toilet. I found out she was in hospital because I was on the street and my neighbour told me. My mother did not tell me herself.
16. She was admitted to GRO-B and I remember that it was on a Sunday in 1997. I cannot recall the exact date. As she was being admitted GRO-B was about to go on a holiday. When he found out that she was being admitted to hospital, he said that he would not go because she looked so bad. She must have heard him and immediately said "*I'm feeling better now, you go on holiday*". While she was in hospital, I did not answer the phone when GRO-B called because I knew he would worry and I did not know what to say to him.

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17. My mother was at [GRO-B] for about a week. She had tests done to find out what was happening to her. When she was there, someone approached me at the hospital and said "*do you know your mum has Hepatitis C?*". I think I responded by saying "*okay, right, thanks very much for telling me*". It was a woman that told me but I am not sure who she was. She worked at the hospital but I do not think that she was ordinary medical staff. I was on my own when I was told and I was told in a very matter of fact way. I had no idea what Hepatitis C was at the time and was not provided with any further information at that time.

18. My mother was then transferred to [GRO-B] for further testing. By then, [GRO-B] had returned from his holiday. While she was there, all three of my brothers had a meeting with my mother's consultant. He told them that she had liver cancer and that she needed to have a stent fitted into her bile duct. He also told my brothers that she had 3, 6 or 9 months to live. It was too late for her to be given any treatment.

19. She had the stent fitted in and it appeared to give her some temporary relief. Despite the stent working, there was nothing more they could do. She was sent back to [GRO-B] [GRO-B] took my mother back to [GRO-B] himself.

20. When they arrived at [GRO-B] my mother did not yet know she had cancer. The doctor at [GRO-B] Dr [GRO-B] was quite loud and [GRO-B] tells me that he asked to speak to him privately when they arrived. He tells me that they went into a broom cupboard at the hospital to talk so that my mother would not have heard them. [GRO-B] asked the doctor if he could not tell my mother that she had cancer. His response was that he could not lie and was not prepared to do this. As such, [GRO-B] decided to let my mother know that she had cancer himself.

21. [GRO-B] called me as well and told me to come home from work. He was the one who told me that our mother had cancer.



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22. After spending a further few days at GRO-B my mother came to live with me so I could look after her. There was no way she would have gone to a hospice. Before she came home I went to GRO-B GRO-B for a consultation with Dr GRO-B. He just said that, in the end, my mother might die of a chest infection because of lying in bed a lot. Once my brothers and I said that we would be looking after her and taking her home, the hospital did not offer or provide us with any support or help to look after her.
23. I returned home with my mother on 30 August 1997. My eldest brother GRO-B wanted to pay for nurses from MacMillan Cancer Support so that they could come and help me look after her. I said "no way", I was her daughter and I was going to look after her, plus I think my mother would have thrown them out of the house.
24. Soon after my mother came to my home I received a phone call from, what I believe was a Hepatitis Agency. A foreign woman on the phone said that my mother had Hepatitis C and that I would need to wear gloves whenever I dealt with her. She also said that when the undertakers came to take her body, I would need to tell them that she had Hepatitis C and that they would need to wear gloves when they put her in a body bag. She also said that I should have myself and my children tested to make sure we were not already infected.
25. I think the person who spoke to me was just trying to help and give me some advice, but it could have been dealt with differently. I was not expecting the call so it was quite a shock and the lady who spoke to me was abrupt. I do not know how she knew that my mother had Hepatitis C. I did not say anything when she spoke to me and I remember that she asked whether she had offended me. I said "no" because I did not want an argument.
26. I had no idea what Hepatitis C was. I thought it was like being a celiac at the time. After receiving the call, I told my mother that I had to wear

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gloves because she had Hepatitis C. She told me that we shouldn't all need to wear gloves and that she would wear them instead. As far as I am aware, that was the first time she was told that she Hepatitis C. She wasn't aware until I told her. After this, she wouldn't let me or any of our family hold her hand unless she put gloves on herself.

27. Apart from being told that I had to wear gloves, I wasn't told anything else about Hepatitis C or provided with any other information about how to deal with it.

28. Following the phone call, I called the [GRO-B] and told them that I needed some gloves because my mother had Hepatitis C. The nurses from the [GRO-B] came out to see my mother and I and said that they would help us. They subsequently came every afternoon to help me.

29. Someone from the [GRO-B] also got in touch with Marie Curie during the last few weeks my mother was at my home so that nurses from Marie Curie could help me during the nights and I could get some sleep. Marie Curie is an organisation that provides care and support through terminal illness. Even though the nurses from Marie Curie were there throughout the night, I got a baby monitor so I could hear if anything was happening. I did not want something to happen with my mother during the night and for her to not tell me.

30. While my mother stayed with me at my home, her condition gradually got worse and she hallucinated. Eventually the doctors started to visit her more frequently. On one occasion, her GP, Dr [GRO-B] came to check her and I asked him how she could have possibly got Hepatitis C. He asked me whether she had ever been to China, and I said "no". It was very strange and I'm not sure how that was relevant to the question I had asked him. He did not provide any indication as to how she had gotten Hepatitis C.

31. [GRO-B]  
[GRO-B] she took to her bed. She had stopped eating by that stage and she would not even drink the high energy drinks from the chemist that I gave to her. She became a darker and darker orange colour. Every two days she looked different, terrible. Her hair, which had remained black, started to turn grey and got wiry. She was a proud woman so my brothers and I got the hairdresser to come to my house and do her hair to make her feel better. Despite feeling unwell, she would still put her lipstick on when someone came to the door. She would not accept not looking presentable.

32. She would not let on how ill she was right up until the end, even though she must have been in terrible pain. I used to hear her on the phone to her sister saying that she wished she were 'away'. She didn't know I could hear her otherwise she wouldn't have said it. We never got a chance to help her with the pain and I just feel so guilty. If someone had told my brothers and I that she could have gotten ill from the blood transfusion she had, she would have never have had it.

33. My mother was eventually put onto a morphine drip not long before she passed away. On the day that she died, all of the family were around her. Not long before she died, she said, "*I don't want to leave you all*" and [GRO-B] said, "*it's okay mum, we're looking after you*". It was horrible at the time but we all had each other. She drifted off into unconsciousness and passed away in the afternoon of [GRO-B] 1998.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

34. As I have already explained, my mother's health after the blood transfusion gradually got worse. I believe this may have been due to the Hepatitis C that she had contracted from the blood transfusion but she was simply not diagnosed until it was too late.



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35. It was not until 2011 when I was reading the Belfast Telegraph that I saw an article that talked about Hepatitis C. In this article it said that Hepatitis C could cause liver cancer. That was the first time I became aware of a link between the two. I was never told by any doctors that Hepatitis C may have been the cause of my mother's liver cancer.

36. Apart from Hepatitis C and liver cancer, I am not aware of my mother suffering from any other illnesses as a result of the blood transfusion she received.

### **Section 4. Consent**

37. My mother would never have provided consent and had the blood transfusion in 1986 if she had known of the risk of infection associated with it. She was a healthy woman and really looked after herself. She did not like the doctors so she would not have taken anything that had such a risk. This makes me think that she was not warned about any risks related to the blood transfusion before she received it. However, I cannot be sure as I was not with my mother when she actually received the blood transfusion.

38. I am certain that my brothers and I were not warned of any risks before she received the blood transfusion. We were simply told that she needed it due to internal bleeding. Very little information was provided to us at the time about what was wrong with our mother, the cause of the internal bleeding and the blood transfusion itself.

### **Section 5. Impact**

39. My mother never discussed the Hepatitis C with me. She only found out about it when she was already terminally ill with the cancer. When I told her that she had Hepatitis C she did not have any reaction to it and I did not make a big thing out of it because I did not know what it was at the

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time. Nobody explained to me why I should be concerned, so I was not concerned about it. In turn, my mother was not concerned about it either.

40. I now know that she got the cancer as a result of the Hepatitis C. My mother would have never known this. She would not have known that she got Hepatitis C from the blood transfusion she had in 1986 either. My mother was never given any treatment for Hepatitis C and it was too late for her to receive any treatment for the cancer. We were all just left to get on with it on our own.

41. In terms of the cancer, she just wanted to die. She was very strong and very assured. For such a tiny lady she had the heart of a lion. My mother knew she was going to die and it was an awful way for her to go. It was definitely not what my mother deserved.

42. I think my family and I should have been provided with more support throughout it all. Just because we as a family decided not to put our mother into a hospice did not mean that we did not need support. We should have received some further advice and information.

43. As a family, it brought us closer together so we could all help her. My brother GRO-B nearly had a nervous breakdown when he found out that our mother had cancer. He was in a dreadful state and was the worst affected. During the last few weeks my mother was at my home, when the Marie Curie nurses came to check on my mother they would ask me how we were all doing. On one occasion, I mentioned that GRO-B wasn't doing too well and that he was taking it all quite badly. The nurses offered to provide him with a counsellor but I declined as he was not at a stage where he was ready for that and he would not have seen one at the time.

44. What happened to our mother affected GRO-B the most because he and my mother were always so close. He was a bachelor at the time, the only one of us that was not married. My mother would worry about him being on his own. When she was well, she would stay with him often and

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cooked for him most days. She was his confidant. GRO-B found it difficult to touch anyone in general, including our mother when she was well, but by the end he had his arm around her. As much as we all worried about our mother, we worried about GRO-B as well as he took it the worst.

45. Even now, when GRO-B or I mention the Inquiry to GRO-B he will try to change the conversation. It was a very traumatic time for him and for all of us.

46. GRO-B's children and my children haven't really spoken about what happened. They were very good with my mother and supportive. GRO-B tells me of the time when he was bringing my mother to GRO-B GRO-B after he had been told that she had cancer. He said that she sat in the back of his car with his children either side of her, hugging her, almost protecting her. I wonder how they and my children were able to get through all of their school exams at the time with everything that went on.

47. My brothers and I never told anyone outside of the family about my mother's Hepatitis C diagnosis because we did not really know what it was or its significance. People still don't really know much about it. At the time that our mother was really ill, we were more concerned about the cancer. People sympathised with us about that.

48. In order to look after my mother, I took time off work. I received pay for three months and then only statutory sick pay for the rest of the time. Overall I looked after my mother at my home for nearly six months. My brothers, mainly GRO-B really helped out during this time, particularly with the finances. GRO-B also made frequent trips to visit mum which was a 120 mile round trip, this affected his business.

49. I also remember that I pulled my back trying to lift my mother in and out of bed when I was looking after her. I did not have the experience that nurses have so I did not know the correct way to lift her up and could not



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always rely or wait for nurses to do this. As a result, I continue to have a back problem now.

50. My husband's work was also affected, as he would run around to the doctors and chemist picking up prescriptions and medicine during the time we looked after my mother. Overall it was a very difficult time and it is upsetting to learn later that the cancer was caused by Hepatitis C, a virus that my mother contracted from a blood transfusion. It was a traumatic time and I suffered from nightmares for about two years after she passed away.

### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

51. My brothers and I received no information once our mother was discharged from hospital following her cancer diagnosis. The doctors did not discuss with us the Hepatitis C or the cancer, neither about what to expect or how to care for our mother.

52. After my mother had a stent fitted into her bile duct, she was better for a short while and she lost the orange look to her. Eventually though I think it closed over as the orange colour in her skin came back. The stent provided some temporary relief but she was otherwise unable to be treated for the cancer as it was too late by the time she was diagnosed.

53. GRO-B had a friend who had a parent with the same type of cancer and they were able to provide us with some information about what to expect about its progression. We didn't get any of this information from the doctors. While the doctors told us about the cancer and that it was too late for any treatment, absolutely no information was provided about the fact that our mother also had Hepatitis C.

54. Because of the lack of general support, I tended to look after mum on my own, not really knowing how best to do things before the GRO-B got involved.

55. Apart from the offer of counselling for [GRO-B] by the Marie Curie nurses, we did not receive any other offers for support or counselling.
56. No one has ever spoken to my brothers or I about what happened to our mother. It was only when I saw the article in the newspaper in 2011 that realised that Hepatitis C had ultimately caused our mother's death. Around that time, I contacted a solicitors firm in Scotland called Thompsons who were dealing with tainted blood, but they said they could not help me because they were dealing with a different legal system.
57. My family and I have thought we were the only family in Northern Ireland that has been affected. It wasn't until the Inquiry was set up that we have realised more people have been affected by the use of infected blood and we started receiving more information.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

58. I first became aware of the Skipton Fund in 2011 when I saw an article in the Belfast Telegraph. I looked into it and asked people about it but no one seemed to have heard of it. On top of this, the doctors I spoke to did not seem to want to get involved.
59. I eventually spoke to my GP, Dr [GRO-B] who really helped me in making an application to the Skipton Fund. He obtained my mother's medical records and took a copy of her death certificate, which I had. Obtaining all the information took time and there seemed to be a lot of brick walls because nobody knew what we were talking about when we tried to get all of the information together. When we finally got all the information together, Dr [GRO-B] filled out the application form with information about my mother's blood transfusion and infection with Hepatitis C. I then sent the application form off to the Skipton Fund.

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60. The Skipton Fund initially provided me with £20,000 as my mother had contracted Hepatitis C from a blood transfusion. I then made a second application because my mother had also died as a result of the Hepatitis C. My mother's death certificate states that her cause of death was cancer and Hepatitis C. As a result of the second application I made, I received a further £50,000 from the Skipton Fund. I decided to split these amounts between my three brothers and I equally. They did not know that I had made the application until I gave them cheques and explained why I had received the money. Overall, the application process took me about a year. We don't however like associating any money with my mother's death.
61. We did not receive any further information from the Skipton Fund following the two payments. The money we received was referred to as an ex-gratia payment, which I now understand to mean that we couldn't claim it again. We were so appreciative at the time and never actually thought about what an ex-gratia payment really meant. We were just glad for what we received.
62. I then got in touch with the Caxton Foundation. I tried to see what they could provide. I was told that I needed receipts from 1997/1998 regarding the income I had lost as a result of taking time off to look after my mother. It was about 2012/2013 when I contacted the Caxton Foundation so by that time, I didn't have any proof of loss of earnings to show them. I tried to get in touch with my previous employer but they did not keep their records over 10 years so could not provide any information about the time I had taken off.
63. In December 2016, the British Government introduced a one-off payment of £10,000 for partners and spouses of anyone who had died because of infected blood. [GRO-B] got in touch with our local MP who then got in touch with the relevant government minister. [GRO-B] contacted them to ask whether I, the daughter of someone who had died because of infected blood, could make a claim. [GRO-B] told them that as her carer, I should be entitled to the £10,000.



64. GRO-B received a letter back from our MP and the Minister for the Department of Health which said that only partners and spouses would be able to receive the £10,000 payment which had been introduced and that we could not make a claim. The letter said that we might instead be eligible for a Bereavement Fund to help with the funeral expenses we incurred. I exhibit the letters that GRO-B received to this effect as **WITN0854002** and **WITN0854003**.

65. GRO-B was not happy. He said that he thinks he punched a wall at the time and could not understand why I should not be entitled to that which a partner or spouse would be entitled to when I had cared for our mother. He said it was an injustice as I looked after our mother every night and our children had to watch their grandmother die.

66. Since being told that we were ineligible for the £10,000 in 2016 we have received no further information regarding financial assistance.

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

67. GRO-B has given blood over 500 times. He used to give whole blood and now he gives plasma and platelets. Whenever he couldn't go he would call the blood centre and explain that he couldn't go because he was ill or had a cold. If he felt ill the next day or two after giving blood he would also call the blood centre to let them know. He was so careful in giving blood, and that makes us wonder why weren't the people taking the blood as careful. It is ironic that GRO-B was so careful in giving blood, yet the blood that our mum received was contaminated. There are so many people that are affected by this and it is so unnecessary.

68. The Inquiry team have been the only people to have been in touch with me regarding this matter. I believe that we need to get to the bottom of what happened. I initially did not want to give a statement but I decided

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that I have to for my mother. I want to know what happened and what went wrong.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated 4-04-2019