

# ANONYMOUS

Witness Name: **GRO-B**

Statement No: WITN3249001

Exhibits: WITN3249002-5

Dated: September 2022

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF **GRO-B**

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

### Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is **GRO-B**. I live at **GRO-B**  
**GRO-B**. My date of birth is **GRO-B**. I currently live with my partner, **GRO-B**. I am a retired teacher currently working as an Executive Assistant.
2. I make this statement in relation to my late uncle, **GRO-B: U**, who was born on **GRO-B** and who passed away **GRO-B** aged 51. He was unmarried and after his diagnosis in 2007 moved to Northern Ireland where he died. Whilst there he had a roommate and from 2007 until his death, much of what we know, we heard from her.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my late uncle's full medical records. If and in so far as I have been provided with

limited records the relevant entries are set out in the medical chronology at the end of this statement.

## Section 2. How infected

4. During the 1980s, my uncle was in a long term relationship with a woman called [GRO-B]. Following allegations of infidelity and an altercation in the pub, [GRO-B] ended their relationship and in anger; my uncle punched a window reinforced with metal parts and damaged the ligaments in his arm.
5. He had an operation at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in Birmingham and was given a whole blood transfusion.
6. My mother was present at the time of the operation. She knew much about them and so explained the process to my uncle. Although he consented to the procedure, he was not given any information about the risks the transfusion carried.
7. After his operation, he never regained full use of his arm and any follow up appointments he attended were for changing his dressings or physiotherapy.
8. In July 2003, my uncle went for blood tests at the hospital as he had begun to experience strange symptoms, namely a swollen abdomen and jaundice. This was odd because he had never drunk alcohol to excess or smoked cigarettes.
9. He received a diagnosis of HCV from Professor J.M. Neuberger at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, which was shared with his GP, Dr [GRO-D] at [GRO-B] [GRO-B], Birmingham, [GRO-B]. It was Dr [GRO-D] that informed [U] of his HCV status, but not until 2007.

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10. My uncle attended a few appointments thereafter to discuss where and when he was infected, but received no answers. He was offered no treatment and nobody from the Primary Care Trust admitted any form of liability. Within the blood test results dated 16/07/2003 it is indicated that it was known that my uncle was HCV positive, however this was the first he knew about it.
11. My uncle underwent a liver biopsy on 20/10/2003 which shows features that indicate chronic hepatitis. I refer to Exhibit **WITN3249002**. The report we have been able to obtain only shows part of the results, with page 2 missing. I believe that page 2 would show the source of his abnormalities to not be linked to alcohol, however this page has gone missing before being sent to us.
12. The report of the above biopsy shows my uncle has an alcohol history, however prior to his diagnosis he rarely drank, and never to excess. I believe this was indicated in an attempt to link his symptoms to alcohol rather than HCV. This also shows within blood tests undertaken on 20/10/2003, 05/01/2004, 23/03/2004 and 08/06/2004 where specific alcohol level checks were undertaken.
13. I do not believe any information whatsoever was given to my uncle in relation to his illness, except that the virus could be passed on via contact with his blood or sexually. As such he should refrain from having unprotected sexual intercourse and inform those whom he had already had sex with. When he discussed this with my mother, he just sobbed.

### Section 3. Other Infections

14. I do not know if my uncle was infected with any other conditions aside from those aforementioned above. There is no way of knowing this for certain, as I have been unable to obtain my uncle's full medical records, despite my continuing efforts. I refer to Exhibit **WITN3249003**. A letter received dated 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 outlined the issues obtaining these records.

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## Section 4. Consent

15. My uncle consented to the blood transfusion, however he was not informed that the products carried any risks; therefore I do not believe he gave informed consent.
16. He had asked for many years why he was experiencing adverse symptoms; however was not given any information until 2007.
17. My uncle consented to the blood test in 2003, however I do not believe that he would have known he was being tested for HCV.
18. I do not know if my uncle was treated without his knowledge or consent or for the purposes of research.

## Section 5. Impact of the Infection

19. Up until the 1980s, my uncle's health was perfectly fine. Once he had the blood transfusion, his health rapidly declined.
20. He constantly battled tiredness and a loss of appetite. As a result of being poorly, he gave up working as it was too physically demanding and employed people to work on his behalf instead. Until 2004/2005, he kept going back to the hospital as he could not figure out what was wrong with his health. He had numerous blood tests, but was always told that nothing was wrong with him. Not once did anyone mention HCV.
21. In 2003, his abdomen became very swollen and his eyes and face had turned yellow, like the symptoms of an alcoholic, yet he never drank or smoked. A week after he found out about the infection, he came home with a six pack of lager and

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a lot of cigarettes and kicked his then- girlfriend out of their shared home. This was very unusual behaviour from him.

22. From 2007, my uncle had ongoing mental health issues associated with his condition and it is felt as though he had suffered a mental breakdown. He would not wash himself and due to excessive gambling, he accumulated a lot of debt. He would regularly gamble at night and particularly online. I recall when I first found out he liked to gamble, I was excited to play alongside him as this was a hobby of mine too, however I soon realised there was a problem when I saw the amounts he was putting at stake.

23. During this period, he lost his appetite which caused him to look very thin, but due to the swelling in his stomach, it seemed like he was eating well. His disposition soon became yellow that even the whites of his eyes were affected. This caused my mother a lot of stress. My uncle became a heavy smoker after the diagnosis and began drinking heavily, I estimate at least eight units a day. This contributed to the ischemic heart disease that eventually killed him.

24. In 2007, my uncle moved to Ireland without telling anyone because he was so devastated. He had always thought only drug users became infected. He completely isolated himself because he struggled so much with the shame of being infected.

25. My uncle first underwent treatment for HCV in the early 2000s and as far as I am aware, he continued treatment until his death. At first he was under the care of Dr. GRO-D GRO-D who told him he should go back to the QEH for treatment. This treatment was overseen by the Heart of Birmingham PCT and was still ongoing until he moved to Ireland. The treatment then continued under Mr. GRO-D at St James Hospital in Dublin. The treatment consisted of both Interferon and Ribavirin. He had to spend one day a week in hospital.

26. Whilst my uncle was undergoing treatment, his condition became progressively worse, although his flatmate believed this was due to alcoholism or the fact that his liver transplant may not have been right. I was confused as I never knew he'd had a transplant and the little medical records we did have, suggested that his liver was relatively normal. His flatmate said that there was scarring on his abdomen from the transplant which he had received a couple of years after moving to Ireland, therefore, after my uncle's death, I attempted to obtain information of this transplant to find out what happened. I rang Mr **GRO-D** at St James Hospital and explained that I needed the information as I was speaking with Collins Solicitors regarding the Infected Blood Inquiry. He hung up immediately, so I remained persistent and kept trying to call, however Mr **GRO-D** would not speak to me.
27. We found out that my uncle had died through Facebook. An acquaintance from Birmingham messaged to say it was sad to hear about my uncle's passing. My mother was his next of kin and the eldest sibling. She should have been informed that her brother had died. We later found out that he had been drinking heavily and was found sitting in a chair already dead, around 48 hours later. We contacted the police station in **GRO-B** to find out more information. They confirmed the body had been identified by his landlord and flatmate. We then contacted the British Consulate to bring his body back to England, but due to him being in Northern Ireland it wasn't easy and took a whole week.
28. My uncle had a post-mortem as exhibited by **WITN3249003**, which revealed that his cause of death was Ischaemic Heart Disease; however it is interesting to note that he had a pale liver. We believed this was caused by HCV causing necrosis of the liver. This was not confirmed, as Waterford General Hospital (WGH) refused to send the liver for further tests or investigations after being told that we were applying to the Skipton Fund. I chased the coroner, and after several pushes, we received the Coroner's Report on 11 August 2014.



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29. Without a Power of Attorney or Grant of Probate, the hospital refused to give us a death certificate and without that, we were unable to hold the funeral. Furthermore, in the post mortem, they had taken my uncle's tissue and it had never been returned to his body. I still don't understand why they retained it.
30. On my uncle's death certificate, it was stated that the cause of death was heart disease. This seems strange to me as my uncle had never shown any signs of heart disease before and as far as I am aware, he was never referred to a heart specialist either.
31. When my uncle was well, he was well known amongst our family and friends as an outgoing and welcoming man. If someone had a problem, they could confide in my uncle and he would be ever ready to help anybody out. He would lend people money and always wanted to help people. He loved inviting people over and enjoyed hosting barbecues and gatherings.
32. After he was diagnosed, he changed completely. He would shut the front door on people's faces, never left the house and did not want to speak with anybody. He didn't want to be seen. My uncle completely isolated himself as he struggled with the shame of what he had been burdened with. If ever he decided to leave the house, he felt as though he was being stared at in the street as he seemed jaundiced all the time. This deterred him from going out as he felt so uncomfortable.
33. Due to the fear that he could pass the virus on to someone else, my uncle never got intimate with anyone and was therefore deterred from pursuing a meaningful relationship. He also refused to have children of his own so he could never start his own family.
34. My uncle was one of five siblings all of whom were very close and would meet every week. He used to run a business as a handyman with his brother and my uncle, [GRO-B]. After his diagnosis, my uncle no longer wanted to speak with

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people, which my mother and [GRO-B] found very difficult, as they wanted to support him the best they could. [GRO-B] and my mother would often discuss this amongst themselves and this made my uncle uncomfortable as he felt they were talking about him behind his back. My uncle lived in Birmingham at the time and my mother and [GRO-B] would travel there to visit him, however he refused to let them in the house.

35. In 2007, he disappeared to Ireland without informing anyone and would only get in touch with his siblings if he needed money. He got himself into a situation where he couldn't afford to live and spiralled into severe debts. He didn't know what to do, so my mother had to take out a loan worth £20,000 for him. I recall coming home from university once and finding debt collectors on my mother's doorstep, because my mother in turn was struggling financially.

36. As far as I am aware, nobody beyond my mother and Uncle [GRO-B] knew about my uncle's HCV status. He was so affected by the stigma that the shame of it caused him to move to Ireland without telling anyone.

37. His GP advised him to inform people he had been in sexual contact with, but when he did so his partner at the time went ballistic accusing him of risking her and her children's lives. I know that he would never have hurt her as he worshipped her.

38. I believe that his flatmate in Ireland knew about his HCV as she tried to pursue a relationship with him, but he did not want to get close with her due to fear of passing on the virus. This fear prevented him from getting intimate with anyone.

39. I have siblings and cousins who are all around the same age as each other. For the most part, we were sheltered from our uncle's illness and it was only after his death that we were able to connect the dots and figure out what had happened. I went with my sister and my mother to his home in Ireland to clear out his belongings and at that point we found several documents which explained a lot. I



tried to elicit and source as much information as I could to support my uncle and my mother. I just wanted to be there for them.

40. My uncle accumulated considerable debts and had developed a gambling addiction. When he died, he was in debt of around £70,000, which my mother and [GRO-B] are still trying to pay off. He was far too young to develop such habits and would never win. He was throwing money that he didn't have on betting and games and in the meantime was not paying his rent.

41. He co-owned a business with [GRO-B] specialising in DIY. He was able to build houses from scratch and provided painting, decorating and construction services; a jack of all trades. It was very physically demanding, so when he became unwell, he was no longer able to continue and instead acted as a consultant for the business, until 2005. Thereafter he lost all interest in the business and started pulling money out of the business to fund his financial problems. In the end the business folded and [GRO-B] had to deal with these debts.

42. My mother took out numerous loans on my uncle's behalf and whenever my uncle asked my mother for money she would loan it to him knowing that he would never be able to pay it off. After my uncle died, when my mother and I went to his flat in Ireland, there were a few people waiting, all absolutely furious, wanting to get their money back from my uncle. We had to be escorted by police because people were at the door baying for blood. We found a letter to the MP and also found a note created by my uncle titled, IOU. He owed a total of £70,000 and had stated that he would apply for that amount from the Skipton Fund. He then went on to list in order who he would pay back first, beginning with my mother and [GRO-B]. My mother had to pay off a considerable amount of my uncle's debts. She is still paying these today. She is a pensioner and simply cannot afford it.

#### Section 6. Treatment/care/support

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43. No counselling or psychological support was made available to my uncle. He just got on with it and whatever happened stayed within the family.

44. I coped with the loss in my own way.

### Section 7. Financial Assistance

45. I was told by the Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust that no records exist of my uncle or his HCV, as all records were destroyed.

46. My uncle wrote to his MP to try and obtain his GP records, but got nowhere, as exhibited by **WITN3249004** and so could not progress with his Skipton Fund application. After my uncle's death I took on the fight, as his next of kin (my mother) is in fragile health. I was told I had to get grant of probate to access medical records for my uncle and was constantly told that I needed my uncle's signature by Birmingham Hospitals. I cannot obtain this as he is dead! This can be seen in the letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

47. I then tried to apply for the NHS fund, mainly to pay the debts left by his death as he did not have life insurance due to the high premium costs due to his diagnosis. Again, having no medical records did not help my case. I have been blocked every time I have tried to sort this out. I was told in 2020 to apply and even without records they would process this. Despite applying I have heard nothing back, and when I rang was told they could only discuss it with the patient or his spouse.

48. To pay for his funeral, my mother and I both took out a loan and used my wages to cover the shortfall.

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## Section 8. Other Issues

49. When I heard about the Infected Blood Inquiry, I tried applying to the NHS Trust for financial assistance and even contacted solicitors, but have been so unlucky in my quest.

50. I am trying my best to help my mother get recognition for what my uncle went through and to show that we are still suffering the consequences today. It has been exceedingly difficult to prove the impact on us, as nobody is willing to provide us with my uncle's medical records.

51. After his death, I tried to contact the Patient Registration Services and a consultant at the QEH, but each time they ask for Power of Attorney or Grant of Probate. Despite this, I carried on asking only to be told that his medical records do not exist anyway. The only ones that we have been sent were blood tests and biopsy results, but only for a very short time. The application requested all records, but specifically those surrounding his diagnosis. We were only sent those covering a 2 year period.

52. Why do the medical records not exist anymore? Why have we been told that they have been destroyed and why are medical records being sent to people that do not exist anymore? People are being shut down left, right and centre. How do they expect us to access assistance or support without giving us access to the records and how are we to prove my uncle had HCV otherwise?

## Anonymity

53. I wish to remain anonymous.

54. I do not want to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.....

**GRO-B**

Dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022.....