Witness Name: GRO-B
Statement No.: WITN4513001
Exhibits: Nil
Dated: 26 03 22

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 06 March 2020.

I, GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B and my date of birth is GRO-B 1962. My address is known to the Inquiry. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C (HCV). In particular, the origin of my infection, the treatment I have received and the subsequent impact on my personal, work and family life.

2. I currently work for a Engineering & Injection Moulding company as a Works Manger, designing and engineering tool moulds. I have held several other jobs in the manufacturing industry over the course of my career.

3. I live with my wife, GRO-B who has also provided a statement to the Inquiry. **(See** GRO-B. We have two children together.

4. I can confirm that I am not legally represented and that the anonymity provisions have been explained to me NOT RELEVANT.

Section 2. How Infected

5. I have not yet been able to find definitive proof of a blood transfusion or treatment with blood related products within my medical records. However, there is one instance of hospital admission in my past that I believe may have necessitated a transfusion and or treatment with blood related products.

6. During the 1980s, I worked for a company called GRO-B Their primary product was manufacturing fireworks, but they also had contracts to produce ordinance for the GRO-B. This included the manufacturing of training equipment GRO-B such as smoke grenades and training bombs. These products would be used during training manoeuvres by the armed forces.

7. As part of this work, a phosphorous processing plant was built at the factory at which I worked. Phosphorus processing is a very haphazard and dangerous operation. The phosphorus plant comprised a main phosphorous bay for processing and outer bays, where the phosphorous would be mixed with other chemicals. One of these bays was essentially a huge mixing bowl – if metal strikes metal in this environment, you'll get a big explosion, so everything is carefully insulated.

8. One day, I was part of the team running the plant. We set the mix and the timer, before leaving the building. As we got outside, I heard a big clanging sound. Foolishly, I went back inside the building rather than waiting for the reaction. As I returned to the building to see what was going on, I opened the door and the reaction happened.

9. It all went a bit hazy then, but I remember the sound of alarm bells ringing and the sensation of dampness as I was being hosed down. When you expose phosphorous to air, it reignites. This means that, when they pulled away my clothes, I caught fire again. I don't really know if I was conscious throughout, but next thing I remember, I woke up in an ambulance with paramedics surrounding me.

10. I was initially taken to Margate General Hospital, but was then moved to the Burns Unit at the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, by ambulance. I arrived at the hospital in terrible pain and was given some super-strength pain killer intravenously. For the next few days, I was basically in another world. I was still in agony, an awful lot of pain, but I was in a dream-like state.

11. I can't remember exactly, but I think I was there for a little over a week. I was in and out of consciousness for a good-few-days. I remember having something plastic inserted into my arm and it was very sore. My parents and my girlfriend at the time visited me frequently throughout my stay in hospital. As I had been badly burnt, I was kept in a separate room which only doctors and nurses were allowed into.

12. Once I was discharged, I needed to attend the hospital once a week for some time for dressing changes and physio. I had severe burns to my face, neck and the whole of my right side. There were also some burns on my left arm. At the time of the accident, I wasn't wearing the full safety equipment which covers the head, just a fire suit, so the burns were extensive. As far as I can remember, I did not have any skin grafts.

13. Besides this incident, I have had no other major hospital admissions or surgeries. I am told that severe burns often require a blood transfusion, though I have no specific recollection of being told I had received one. I have never taken drugs, been sexually promiscuous or had a tattoo, nor have I been medically treated abroad or any other place deemed to be high risk.

14. Over the course of my subsequent contact with both the Hepatitis C Trust and the British Liver Trust, I was advised to think back throughout my medical history and identify any periods of treatment that may have required that I receive a blood transfusion. As previously stated, this is the only point in my life that I would have needed a blood transfusion and, therefore, the only exposure I could have had to hepatitis C.

Section 3. Other Infections

15. I do not believe that I have been infected with or exposed to any infection other than HCV. However, as I'll explain later, I do think that some of my recent and ongoing medical problems may have been caused by or exacerbated by infection with the HCV virus.

Section 4. Consent

16. As previously noted, if I did receive a blood transfusion during the period of hospital admission following this accident at work, I was not aware of having received such treatment. I, therefore, did not have the opportunity to consent to it.

17. As I explain in further detail below, I am also unable to recall consenting to being tested for HCV and HIV. I have vague memory of HCV being mentioned prior to my diagnosis and my doctor has told me that he did inform me this was being tested for, so I may simply be forgetting. However, HIV was never mentioned to me before I received a negative result and I was quite surprised to see that they had tested me for this.

Section 5. Diagnosis

18. I regularly enjoy taking part in long-distance walks for charity. I have a group of friends that I do this with and we have done lots of these together, raising money for various charities. Over the years, they have gotten harder and take an increasingly lengthy period of time to recover from. We did a particularly gruelling walk about a year ago and I never really recovered from it. Obviously, we are all getting older but I am the only one amongst the group who is experiencing fallout to this extent.

19. I've also suffered for quite some time with chronic nosebleeds – from around 2006. I have needed to have the veins in my nose cauterized in the past but the treatment has failed to stop the regular nosebleeds.

20. Just before Christmas of 2019, I went to see my doctor with a number of symptoms. My legs had swollen up after the latest charity walk and I had also started passing blood in my urine. Obviously, this was quite concerning, so I went to see Dr GRO-B at GRO-B Medical Practice.

21. When I mentioned that I also have chronic nosebleeds, I think that Dr GRO-B thought this was worthy of further investigation. I even think that it is possible that she may have mentioned something about HCV at this point, though I am not certain of this.

22. Not long after this, I had some blood tests done and in February or March of this year, I was diagnosed with HCV. At the time, I was being seen by Dr GRO-B GRO-B at the same surgery. He has since told me that he informed me over the phone that he was testing me for HCV, but I have no memory of this this.

23. I was really not happy with the manner in which I was informed of my diagnosis. I received a letter in the post. My wife and I are obviously very trusting and I have no problem with her opening my mail. However, for her to open a letter and see a positive result for hepatitis was obviously distressing for both of us. Surely for such a serious condition I could have been afforded the courtesy of a face-to-face meeting?

24. I was also sent a referral form for an appointment at Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother Hospital in Margate. This form came with a sheet of test results that indicated I had also been tested for HIV. Again, I do not remember being told that they would be testing for this and if I'm honest it was a bit of a shock seeing those words on paper.

25. I had a telephone consultation with a doctor at my local practice not long after my diagnosis, but it was pathetic. The doctor knew nothing about my condition and I told him more than he told me. Because of the current situation with Covid-19, I have only had telephone appointments and I have never met my Consultant at William Harvey Hospital, Dr Shah.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

26. Having been diagnosed in February of this year, I was on a three-month course of anti-viral medication by April. The drug was called Epclusa and apparently works out at about £400 per tablet. I was prescribed one a day.

27. The initial test results, taken on 28th July and 1st September 2020, appear to suggest that I have cleared the virus. I had another confirmatory test at the end of September which confirmed the clearance. I will require a fibro-scan and further blood tests at six-monthly intervals.

28. I recently had a bit of an argument with one of my consultants over the extent of my liver damage. They were being extremely vague and couldn't explain to me how advanced the damage caused to my liver was. I just wanted to know – not be fobbed off but couldn't seem to make him see that. My consultant nurse, Sandra Pilchard, has, however, mentioned compensated cirrhosis to me.

29. This was confirmed during a one-off telephone consultation that I had with a Dr Muller, from a hospital in Canterbury. He was very good; his advice was clear and concise. Dr Muller confirmed that I was suffering from compensated cirrhosis as a result of chronic hepatitis C infection.

30. As I explain in greater detail below, (under Section 7, Impact) I have had mental health issues in the past, though this has not been a big issue for me in the last four to five years. However, no psychological support or counselling has been offered to me or my family, neither at the point of diagnosis or as part of my HCV treatment.

31. As previously noted, the vast majority of my consultations and meetings with doctors, nurses and other medical professionals have been conducted over the phone, because of the Covid crisis. I haven't had a great deal of information from the hospital or my local surgery and I have had to find for myself a lot of crucial information on how to manage the infection and stop the spread, mainly from the internet.

32. I have not needed any dental treatment since my diagnosis so cannot say that it has had an impact. I am, however, quite anxious about eventually needing to find a dentist and informing them.

Section 7. Impact

33. Having not known about my infection with HCV until very recently, I am only able to recall the physical and mental impacts of my hepatitis retrospectively. I can, however, think of several health impacts that may have been caused by the infection. The diagnosis and subsequent treatment have also had a considerable impact on various aspects of my life. The following section will be divided into the following headings – a) Physical health, b) Mental health, c) Work life and d) Family and social life.

Physical health

34. I have had several physical symptoms that I now believe may be attributed to my infection with HCV. This includes the chronic nosebleeds that have been previously noted. Another example is my eyesight. This has got considerably worse over the past year or so and I now always need my glasses with me. A lot of things have deteriorated over this time period so it is difficult to know what is just general aging and what is a symptom of my HCV. This is also the case with my joints; my wrists and knees can be very painful, particularly at night. I have previously just put this down to getting older and have used wrist protectors etc.

35. My sleeping pattern has never been great, but I think it deteriorated significantly in the 1990s. I used to sleep walk on occasion and I'd sometimes do odd things like get out of bed and sleep on the floor. I have had no noticeable night-sweats, but my sleeping habits have not been usual for some time. However, they were never as erratic prior to my accident.

36. I recall that I had a very long flu that was hard to shake over the millennium period. I essentially went to bed on Christmas Eve 1999 and didn't get up until New Years Day, 2000. I can remember this clearly, as all of my family were celebrating and I now wonder if this was caused by my HCV infection. I have

noticed difficulty in shaking off colds and flu when afflicted, especially in the latter years.

37. Since the 1980s, I have been to see my GP on several occasions with complaints of a general fatigue. I had no 'get up and go' and was finding it difficult to motivate myself. This was all prior to my diagnosis but again was never a problem I experienced prior to my accident and hospitalisation.

38. This particular health complaint is one that has worsened since my diagnosis and as a result of the treatment I have received. I have had severe fatigue and lethargy – so extreme that it could suddenly cause me to stop functioning. I'd find myself just instantly running out of steam. I'd have to sleep no matter the time of day and simple tasks would take me longer than they ever had done before. Despite having very nearly completed my treatment and having stopped taking the medication, I do not believe that my functionality has returned completely and I am still struggling with general tiredness a lot of the time.

39. Another side effect of my treatment has been persistent tinnitus. I had not experienced this at all prior to my treatment and it has subsided since it has finished. However, when it is quiet, I can still get a fairly low frequency tinnitus. On occasions it will wake me from my sleep. I hope it clears completely with time as it is annoying and affects your mood. I have also been suffering from very painful headaches across the front of my forehead since I started my medication.

Mental health

40. I have struggled with mental health issues in the past and had what I believed to be depression around the late 1990s. It was enough to go to the doctor, but I didn't really seek any specialist psychiatric help. I was given Valium a couple of times by my doctor and I was once prescribed Prozac, but I stopped taking this after two weeks.

41. It was a rather traumatic time for me. Over the last few years, I have managed to leave these problems behind; the last time I considered myself to be struggling with depression was around 2015/16.

42. Luckily, my diagnosis and treatment has not led to a return of these mental health problems. However, finding out that I have HCV has inevitably caused me some anxiety. I am not unduly worried, but there is obviously the potential for me to worry about the future as I find out more about the damage that has been done to my liver.

Work and financial life

43. My job can involve quite a lot of pressure – the company has a lot of dealings overseas and if I make a mistake, it can lead to a really issues financially and disrupt critical timing plans. After my diagnosis, I struggled with my concentration and knowing that the reputation of the company was on the line only made this worse. Starting my treatment increased this stress as well, as my concentration suffered even more when I began taking the medication. I found it hard to focus and would find my mind wandering from the task in hand. It meant things took longer to do.

44. When the UK went into lockdown because of Covid-19, I was working from home. I was very well supported by my boss; he allowed me to work unconventional hours. I would usually work 3-4 hours in the morning, before the medication kicked in about midday. I'd then sleep for a few hours and make up the time by working into the evening.

45. There was a bit of increase in my stress levels when I returned to the office. People have access to you, so your working day isn't on your own terms. I got more anxious and stressed as a result of the increased face-to-face contact. I usually like to get involved, around the office and on the shop floor and know what's going on with all of my colleagues. Now I'm no longer able to do this, the freedom of my routine is restricted.

46. I made the decision to inform my boss myself. Everyone already knew I was having some health difficulties, but didn't know exactly what. It was a bit awkward telling my boss, but I'm glad that I did. I found out afterwards that I didn't actually need to tell him the exact diagnosis, but it was my decision to do so anyway.

47. A couple of weeks ago he told me that he didn't think I looked so good and he had noticed that I wasn't quite myself. We've now decided that I'm going to routinely work from home. I will still be able to go into the office when I need to, such as for important meetings and the like. I would rather be working in the office ideally, but I understand why my boss thinks it's best that I stay at home. At least they are being very accommodating and supporting me through it all.

48. It may be too early to say, but at this stage there has been no impact on my career progression. I do worry that I won't ever return to normal though; despite the fact that my treatment has finished, I know I'm still not what I was before.

Family and social life

49. My wife has been a rock for me throughout it all, she really has been a fantastic support to me. It was a massive shock to realise that she, and maybe even our children, may have been infected by me. It is hard to put into words the depth of the feeling of dread that you could have inflicted something so potentially life changing on your loved ones. Until she got tested in March, it was a very fraught time. This test was not something that was offered, we had to organise it ourselves.

50. However, it has certainly put a strain on our marriage. No matter how good your relationship is, suspicion can always creep in. We have a wonderful bond, but there have been moments where I can tell she must have been wondering whether there's a possibility that I caught it elsewhere. She has never asked me the question, but I'm sure she must have thought about it. It would be hard not to let it at least cross your mind.

51. We haven't told the wider family. I am quite close with my wife's extended family, but we won't be telling them. It is a source of embarrassment and there

is a definite stigma associated with hepatitis C so it is best to keep it as private as possible.

52. Telling my two sons was very hard, but they were great about it too. My 20-year-old son was concerned that it was an STD, but overall, he was probably more of a grown up about it than I was. My other son is at university and it hasn't had much of an impact on him either. But that does not stop you worrying about the possible disruption it could have on their lives.

53. As soon as I was told to, I stopped consuming any alcohol. A lot of my social life revolved around the pub and my friends and I, those that do the charity walking would enjoy a couple of pints when we got together. Obviously, there hasn't been a lot of pub trips now because of lockdown anyway, but it has had an impact on my social life.

54. Last time I met up with these friends, they obviously noticed that I wasn't drinking. I just told them I was having a bit of trouble with my liver, which led to a bit of banter about me being an alcoholic. It was all light-hearted and in good jest. The transition to not drinking has been a piece of cake though, no issue at all.

55. I do like the occasional game of golf and recently I have been able to pick this hobby up again, though with the deterioration in my sight and physical ability I'm not as good as I was before.

Section 8. Financial Assistance

56. I have applied for compensation from the English Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS), but I have not yet had any response from them. I sent the forms to my consultant in late June, so it has been three or four months. I have been chasing it up with Dr Shah, GRO-D

57. I came across the EIBSS through my own research and from conversations with the Hepatitis C Trust. I was not told anything about the scheme from anyone in the NHS. I had no difficulty completing the forms and the application was relatively straightforward. Waiting for my consultant to complete treatment

data required on the forms has been the biggest issue and is still preventing me from submitting them to the EIBSS board.

Section 9. Other Issues

58. When the Covid-19 lockdown began, I requested a shielding letter from the hospital. I think I remember seeing people with cirrhosis or liver issues on the shielding list, but then later it wasn't, but I can't remember exactly. I suppose HCV should be on the list itself, but it's early days for me in terms of HCV experience.

59. Despite all of this, I still admire the NHS for what they do. That said, the handling of the whole thing has been far from ideal and there has been a lot of administrative issues that have made it all a little more difficult. For example, I received a letter saying that I need a gastrointestinal endoscopy, but this has never been mentioned again since. But I don't put that sort of thing on the same level as what the doctors and nurses do – I think they do an incredible job. I'd also like to thank the Hepatitis C Trust & British Liver Foundation, they have been really helpful.

60. It really has been the lack of support that is the main issue for me. You have to ask for it all, when it really should be offered to everyone that needs it. The way I was informed about my infection put a great strain on my family – such a bolt out of the blue was a huge shock to us. There has also been such a lack of information provided to us. I've had to find out so much from my own research, things that I really should have been told about by the NHS. Thank God for the internet; I can't imagine how worrying it would have been without that resource.

61. My main worry now is my life's longevity and my family. I hope that it has done its worst to me already, but I can't know. Is my liver going to get worse? Will it come back? What will happen if I deteriorate to the extent that I can't provide the support my family requires? There are too many questions unanswered for me to put my mind at ease.

62. I would like to add that in mid-November I caught Covid 19. I am only just now recovering from that. It has taken a great deal of time. My wife also caught it but recovered within 4 or 5 days. The problems I have suffered with headaches and fatigue were greatly compounded by the virus and I believe that my infection with HCV has weakened my immune system, making it harder to fight off such virus' and prolonging the time taken to make a full recovery.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-B

Dated 26 03 22