

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN4989001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 13th May 2021

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 28 April 2021.

GRO-B will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is GRO-B My date of birth is GRO-B 1959 and my address is GRO-B
2. I live alone and I work as a 'domestic' within a hospital. I have 5 children, who are all grown up, and 4 grandchildren. I intend to speak about my infection with hepatitis C ('HCV'). In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment received and the impact it had on me, my family and our lives together.
3. I have an especially poor memory, possibly caused by the HCV. As such, I am unable to remember specific dates and even periods of time

concerning when certain events happened. I have been assisted in providing this statement to the Inquiry by my youngest son, GRO-B

Section 2. How Infected

4. When I was around 7 or 8 months pregnant with my second child in 1983, I began to feel very tired. I went to Warrington Hospital where I had my bloods tested, the results of which showed that my blood count was very low.
5. When I was in the hospital I remember being attached to a drip. The contents of the bag I was connected to appeared to be a very dark red colour, and I simply assumed this was blood. I can also recall being told by a nurse that I would need a blood transfusion.
6. I was in hospital for the best part of an afternoon, and I was conscious throughout. I believe that I was attached to the blood drip for a few hours at least. Apart from this, I remember very little about being in hospital on that occasion.
7. When I was attached to the drip there were 4 or 5 doctors in green gowns and masks standing around me. I wondered at the time why they were all stood there, apparently just waiting for something. I was later told that my baby could have had a reaction to what they were doing, so they may have been required to rush me to theatre if anything had happened.
8. Nothing occurred, I left hospital that day and I gave birth to my second child on GRO-B 1983. The birth went smoothly and I had no issues. I had twin girls in 1987 and my youngest son, GRO-B was born in 1991.
9. Whilst I was pregnant with GRO-B I began to feel generally unwell and I lost a lot of weight. I was checked over at Warrington Hospital and had blood tests. I was told by one of the nurses that I had the liver function of an 80 year old, I was aged 32. The doctors were baffled as to the cause of my weight loss. I was tested for various cancers but these all

came back negative. After my discharge from hospital I was not given any indication as to what the cause was of my poor liver function test results.

10. After this, I continued life as normal, bringing my children up as a full-time job. My health was deteriorating over this time, and by 2007 I was increasingly worried about my general wellbeing. I had also been suffering with bouts of depression for some time and I constantly felt extremely tired. I used to attribute this to my low blood counts and deficiencies in iron. I now realise that my HCV infection was a factor in all of this.
11. I went to see my GP around 2007 complaining of general fatigue and an overwhelming feeling of weakness. I was jaundiced, my complexion and eyes had a yellow tinge to them. I also had pains in the side of my stomach, around my liver. My GP performed tests and did a liver function test. I remember that he asked me about my drinking and I told him that I had never been a big drinker at all, which was true.
12. After taking a liver function test which again showed that my liver had the condition of an 80 year old, my GP took a test for HCV. Around a week later I was called back to the GP where I was told face to face that I was HCV positive.
13. Upon being told of my HCV infection, I did not know what HCV was. I knew about hepatitis A and B, but I was not aware of hepatitis C. I knew that it was associated with a certain type of lifestyle. My initial reaction was one of complete shock and disgust. I simply did not know how I could have contracted HCV. To me it was a dirty disease.
14. I was advised by my GP that I should tell my previous partners. I was also told not to share toothbrushes, towels and razors, for example. I also believe that I was given leaflets regarding HCV and controlling the risks of infection. At the time my children were still young and I was very

cautious around them. I felt ashamed, even feeling as if people would view me as a drug addict.

15. My GP, who at that time was Dr Dennis at GRO-B tried to identify the cause of my infection. He asked whether I had received treatment abroad or if I had been received any dental treatment. However, I had not ever been treated for anything in another country and knew that I couldn't have contracted HCV from my dentist as I had not had any invasive procedures. I mentioned my treatment at Warrington Hospital in 1983 when I believe that I received a blood transfusion. After mentioning this, it became accepted that this must have been the cause of my infection.
16. After my diagnosis I was referred to Warrington Hospital where I was offered treatment. At the initial consultation I was told that my liver was scarred. I was also told that if the treatment failed, I wouldn't have the option of receiving a second course of treatment. Put simply, it either worked or I would get cirrhosis and then possibly cancer as a result. At this stage it was also mentioned that I could need a liver transplant. After hearing this I thought I was going to die.
17. I started treatment for my HCV a few weeks after being diagnosed. When I was first offered the treatment, I was told that it cost £25,000. The treatment itself consisted of interferon, self-injected once weekly, and ribavirin tablets taken daily. The nurse who dealt with me told me that there were 6 types of HCV, 1-6 with 6 being the most severe. I was told that I had type '3'.
18. Although it didn't concern me that I had to self-inject the interferon, the medication itself completely 'floored' me. This lasted for 2 to 3 days before I started to feel a bit better but then the time would come around when I had to take the next dose and I would be 'wiped out' all over again.

19. During my treatment I was not working but was taking care of the kids full time by myself. It was very tough doing this whilst experiencing the horrendous side-effects of the treatment.

20. Throughout the treatment I went for check-ups at the hospital but I cannot remember how often these were. I remember my viral load being monitored but I don't remember the outcome of these tests.

21. After completing the 6 month course of treatment, I was told that it been successful in clearing the HCV.

Section 3. Other Infections

22. I do not believe that I received any infections other than HCV.

Section 4. Consent

23. I consented to being both tested and treated for HCV.

Section 5. Impact

24. I felt a great deal of shame and embarrassment after being diagnosed with HCV. It made me feel dirty having to attend the same clinics as alcoholics and drug addicts. I was embarrassed to find things such as red stickers and caution notes on my medical files and notes whenever I went to hospital. They weren't guarded, anyone could see what was on the front cover. There was certainly a dirty stigma associated with HCV.

25. As a result of this stigma, I kept my infection with HCV within my close family. I was cautious around my children and was very particular about what towels and toothbrushes they used. Having strived to keep my infection close within my family, I was shocked and angered to find out that my daughter's friend, who worked at the local dental surgery, had told other people that I had HCV. Having been forced to declare this, I

felt let down and embarrassed. This was after I had received the treatment and was effectively 'cleared'.

26. My diagnosis put a big strain on the relationship with my partner. GRO-C

GRO-C

27. I have always been conscious of not wanting to pass on the infection to the point that I still make sure that I kiss my grandchildren on the cheek.

28. My daughter would avoid situations whereby I would be looking after my granddaughter. This also continued for a while after I had been 'cleared'.

29. I suffer from brain fog and memory loss, which I attribute to a certain extent to my HCV infection. I am very forgetful even now, and my son believes this has worsened over time. Even when GRO-B was young he recalls that I used to forget where I was when we went out shopping for the day. I was diagnosed with a benign tumour on my brain around 3 years ago, found to be in between the brain and the skull. I have an MRI scan every year to monitor this and to ensure it does not grow further.

30. At a hospital appointment for an unrelated condition, I was the first to be taken down into the theatre. I was then told that I had to be left until last because of 'this', while pointing at my records, which was obviously a reference to my HCV. This has even occurred since I had cleared the HCV. An example of this is when I am sent a blood test form – they put a red sticker on the form, saying something like 'caution', I can't remember if it says anything else. I felt and still feel very stigmatised by this.

31. At dental appointments I have had to disclose that I had HCV. I was always given late appointments and it was noticeable how the dentist and nurses wore extra equipment and masks. They appeared to be more cautious after my HCV diagnosis, which felt degrading. I feel horrible

looking back on these visits to the dentist. PPE is common during these days of Covid-19 but back then not even medics would bother generally with gloves and masks but they did with me because of HCV. I do wonder who, if anyone, I have infected.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

32. I have not faced any difficulties in obtaining treatment, care or support in relation to my infection with HCV.

33. I have had counselling and psychological support since I was a child, owing to my history with depression. This was offered solely in relation to my own mental health issues. I have not been offered any form of counselling or psychological support as a result of my infection with HCV.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

34. My GP informed me about the Skipton Fund. He said that people with HCV infected by blood transfusions were eligible to apply. I think that my GP gave me the details on a piece of paper which I used to contact them.

35. In the process of applying to the Skipton Fund I applied for my medical records. I applied to both my GP and Warrington Hospital, costing £50 each, totalling £100. I remember being told that my hospital records would be stored in Salt Mines in Wales and couldn't work out what that meant. I did receive some records, including those relevant to the birth of my second child. I do not remember seeing anything that related to a blood transfusion but then again some of them were very medical and technical and I wouldn't be able to work out what they meant.

36. I applied to the Skipton Fund with my medical records enclosed, but this application was rejected because there was insufficient evidence. After

receiving this rejection, I left it there and decided not to appeal against this decision.

Section 8. Other Issues

37. I can think of no other issues, apart from that when I was aged 8 or 9, so in the late 60s, I remember that I was jaundiced. I am not aware of any blood transfusions that I may have received as a child.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-B

Dated 13th May 2021