



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

Witness 2: Lynn Kofler

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[00:00:00]

Geneviève Eliany

If you could please state your name and spell it for the record, please.

Lynn Kofler

Lynn Kofler, K-O-F-L-E-R, L-Y-N-N

Geneviève Eliany

And do you promise or affirm to tell the truth today?

Lynn Kofler

Absolutely.

Geneviève Eliany

Could you tell us what your professional training is?

Lynn Kofler

I am a registered nurse.

Geneviève Eliany

And where were you working, without naming the institution, during the pandemic?

Lynn Kofler

I was working in long-term care.

Geneviève Eliany

Can you tell us about some injuries you witnessed which appeared to be correlated to the administration of the vaccine?

Lynn Kofler

Yeah, we had large numbers of the residents with extremely painful arms for, like, days and days. They couldn't even lift their arms and stuff. We had to prop them on a pillow. We saw some patients break out in these huge boils. This one gentleman had boils all over his back. He was on four different types of antibiotics and nothing would help. And on time I left, he was still dealing with at least two that were still there, that we had to dress and clean every day.

Geneviève Eliany

How long were you working in this long-term care home?

Lynn Kofler

I have been working long-term care for four years.

Geneviève Eliany

Can you comment on how many deaths there were in your stay at this long-term care home?

Lynn Kofler

Well, my last long-term care home, which is shocking for me: the building holds 55 residents and they keep a book and a log when people pass. And there were 34 deaths out of 55 in a one-year period I was there.

Geneviève Eliany

Was that higher than what you had observed in your previous years working in the long-term care?

Lynn Kofler

In all my years of nursing, period. I've never seen that kind of death rate.

Geneviève Eliany

I understand that you worked nights and you were receiving communications and faxes. Can you tell us about what you learned from this correspondence?

Lynn Kofler

Sure. Because I was working night, I would get all the faxes and have to file them all. But I would frequently get the fax that came from the government and it would list the local, the area of our group, all the nursing homes. And which ones were in lockdown, which ones were in lockdown for COVID and which ones were in lockdown for influenza or any other

reason. I found, every time I got those, our nursing home was in COVID lockdown; only we never had one case in the whole full year I worked there.

Geneviève Eliany

To be clear: Again, the faxes and the correspondence were reporting that your institution was closed for a lockdown, even though there was no COVID that you knew about.

Lynn Kofler

Right, and sometimes we weren't in lockdown. On occasion, we had to be in lockdown because we had some false positives for staff or patients. but after a two-week period, the lockdown would be gone until the next occurrence. But there was never COVID in the building.

Geneviève Eliany

What impact did you see on the residents with respect to lockdowns and lack of visitors?

Lynn Kofler

Oh, it was really hard to watch. They had to stay in their rooms. They ate out of paper plates, paper cups, plastic cups. They were no longer allowed to go to the dining room. They were no longer allowed to participate in any activities: crafts, music, anything. They were literally in their rooms for the whole two-week lockdown periods, which there were quite a few when I was there.

And they had no socialization. Just whoever was in their room but frequently they're not always— You know, we have dementia patients and that kind of thing, so it's not like real company. It's not like getting out and talking and having conversation and being able to interact with people. That was a huge impact.

And we found there was an increase in confusion, actually. Because frequently, they didn't know what was happening and they'd be all stressed and they'd walk out of the room and then they'd have to be put back in the room. It was really hard to watch.

I know that some patients we saw just stopped eating; they stopped getting out of bed. And I really believe that they more or less died because they had no clue why family members weren't coming. Where are their grandchildren? You know, where are the people who love them? And they could not see them at any point.

[00:05:00]

Geneviève Eliany

Let's speak about your personal experience. As far as you can tell, when do you suspect you first had COVID?

Lynn Kofler

I first had COVID actually February 2020, before the thing was announced. And I knew I had COVID because I had six years of never had a flu or a cold. I take a lot of vitamins. I take

vitamin D, C, all those; I was already taking them. So they had prevented colds for a long period of time for me.

But when I got what I perceived was COVID, I was flat out for three days. I, like, couldn't even move off the couch. And then after three days, I was fine. I was up and about and I didn't have the headache, didn't have the sore throat or anything like that. I was fine.

Geneviève Eliany

And I understand you refused the vaccine, is that correct?

Lynn Kofler

Yes, I did.

Geneviève Eliany

What were some of the reasons that you chose not to receive it?

Lynn Kofler

Well, I have health issues and I had tested positive for lupus two years ago, so they're monitoring that. I have other autoimmune issues that really prevented me from wanting to take the risk of putting anything in my body that might increase my symptoms or make my issues worse.

Geneviève Eliany

How did your refusal impact your ability to work?

Lynn Kofler

Sorry?

Geneviève Eliany

How did your refusal impact your ability to work?

Lynn Kofler

Initially, the nursing home was— I was fine. I worked in COVID right up until October 9th, 2021. I worked all through there. I worked large amounts of hours. I mean, I felt like I was never home, but they started saying stuff like, "Okay, with the nursing home: owners of the nursing home are looking to get everybody vaccinated." So that was the first step.

Then the next step was: those who weren't vaccinated now had to do this little online course, that they told you all about COVID and all that stuff. I mean, we are registered nurses, I think we understood that. They put us in front of that and it went through the whole list of what it was. And at the bottom it says, "Are you now willing to get the vaccine?" To which, of course, we all went, "No." I don't know why they thought that that little teaching session would help us—but anyway.

And then the next thing that kept occurring was we didn't get discreet letters. We would walk into our lockers for the morning shift and the letters would be pasted on all the people who weren't vaccinated, saying that we had until October 9th, 2021.

Geneviève Eliany

When were you put on leave?

Lynn Kofler

I was never put on leave. I just never got any shifts after October 9th and was requested not to return.

Geneviève Eliany

And ultimately, what happened to your nursing license?

Lynn Kofler

I had my nursing license for a while, but now it is— I relinquished it, because I turned 65 on February 4th. In order for me to get back into nursing, in case they open the door again, I would have to go through remedial stuff: more work, courses, all that kind of stuff to get up and running again. So the time period for me, it's not possible for me to work in nursing again.

Geneviève Eliany

Did you consider trying to find work in other areas of health care?

Lynn Kofler

I did and every area of health care I was not allowed to work there.

Geneviève Eliany

And you weren't allowed to work because of your vaccination status, just to make it clear.

Lynn Kofler

Exactly. Yeah.

Geneviève Eliany

Okay. Ultimately, what did you do to support yourself?

Lynn Kofler

I was 10 months unemployed. I withdrew money from my RRSP, I withdrew money from my tax-free savings. I cancelled all my magazines, my cable TV, anything I could scale down on. I started selling my stuff on Marketplace and made it through the 10-month period. And I was constantly applying for jobs locally, in Coburg and Port Hope—and not getting any response. I felt it probably was due to the fact that I was overqualified for minimum wage jobs and that I was too old.

Geneviève Eliany

Do you regret your decision?

Lynn Kofler

Do I regret my decision to not get the vaccine? Absolutely not. I think it was the right thing to do. For me.

Geneviève Eliany

And if you can make recommendations on how,

[00:10:00]

let's say, specifically the circumstances and the management of the situation could have been better handled in long-term care, what would some of those recommendations be?

Lynn Kofler

In regards to myself, or in regards to the patients and all that?

Geneviève Eliany

You're welcome to comment on the patients, but since you were staff there, with respect to management of the staff.

Lynn Kofler

Right. I think that, first of all, nursing— I've been a nurse for 40 years. So in a 40-year period, we all knew that we're working under stressful situations, always short-staffed. And they were constantly calling you to come in and you rarely had a day off. But that just meant that when we were short-staffed, then the patients got less attention. Frequently, if it was their bath day, for example, they would skip it and hope that the next day they'd have enough staff to actually get the person bathed and cleaned and stuff. So that was kind of tough, but that's a normal part.

But I found it really hard to— When I began to talk to other nurses about the things I had been learning about COVID and why I had chosen not to vaccinate, I went to work and there were two days in the week that I had shifts and all the others were gone. Normally, I look at my schedule and the whole entire thing is full. I phoned up my manager and I said, "What's going on?" And she said, "We heard you were going to the rally in Ottawa." And I went, "Excuse me?" "You were telling people you were going to the rally in Ottawa." I said, "I never ended up going, but that was the plan. I just never had enough time off to go."

And under that condition, because of that—that I wanted to go to the rally—they took away my shifts. Even though they were short-staffed, they still took away my shifts as kind of a punishment. And then once they discussed it with me, they brought all the shifts back because I didn't go while I was working with them.

After I got let go, I definitely went to Ottawa just for the day—to see. I wanted to see for myself what it was really like, what was really happening up there.

Geneviève Eliany

Is it fair to say that you'd never lost shifts before because of political beliefs?

Lynn Kofler

No, never, no. No.

Geneviève Eliany

Certainly sounds unusual.

Lynn Kofler

Yeah, it does.

Geneviève Eliany

We'll see if the commissioners have any questions for you.

Lynn Kofler

Sure.

Commissioner Drysdale

Thank you for coming down. Are you aware of the adverse reactions reporting system in Canada, sometimes called CAEFISS [Canadian Adverse Events Following Immunization System]?

Lynn Kofler

No, I am not.

Commissioner Drysdale

You mentioned that you noticed some of the residents in the long-term care facility were having soreness of arms and whatnot. Do you know whether anyone was making reports to higher-ups about those reactions to the health department, or—?

Lynn Kofler

Well, those issues were spoken of from shift to shift, but I don't think they were ever really documented or ever really catalogued in any way, shape, or form.

Commissioner Drysdale

Okay. You mentioned the conditions in the facility with the lockdowns, or lockdowns for various reasons. And the patients were in the rooms, they couldn't get out, they had no social interaction. Did the Province of Ontario provide any oversight, any regulation, any inspection of these facilities to see the conditions that were going on and to make comment? Or did they provide any guidance to lockdowns and social interactions?

Lynn Kofler

Well, I had overheard that there was a Ministry person in the office with the Director of Care. I happened to be in the other room on the computer and I heard them talking, but I didn't specifically hear what they said. But it was obvious that the Director of Care had to do what the Ministry was telling them and I was quite surprised that the Director of Care had no response, but kind of like a "yes, sir" response.

Commissioner Drysdale

I understand that—that the direction on how to lockdown was there. But did anyone from the government come into the facility to actually check with their eyes to see the condition of the patients and what the effects of those lockdowns were on those residents?

Lynn Kofler

I'm not sure. I saw that lady come but I wasn't sure if she was there to assess the residents or the conditions or anything. I'm not sure why she was there.

Commissioner Drysdale

Do you have any idea how many staff in the facility were treated similar to you?

[00:15:00]

In other words, lost shifts or left the facility due to this issue?

Lynn Kofler

There weren't a huge amount of staff in there. It was a 55-patient unit but when I was asked to leave, there were also at least four others who were asked to leave. And in an institution that small, that was a big chunk.

Commissioner Drysdale

Well, you had mentioned earlier that you're always understaffed. And if you lost four staff due to this issue, how would that affect the care the residents were getting?

Lynn Kofler

I'm sure it was even worse than usual. I know before I left, I had to train the person who was going to replace me. I know for a fact that these PSWs [personal support workers] especially were fast-tracked in their coming to Canada actually; and also fast-tracked into education in order to work as a PSW. Which made the staff who were already PSWs and working their butt off angry because they were getting so much more pay and they didn't even have to take the long courses that they had to take to become PSWs. They were six-month online course and then they were in the building.

Commissioner Drysdale

Are you describing a somewhat toxic situation in the facility with staff angry, short of staff, patients locked into their rooms for days or weeks on end?

Lynn Kofler

Yes. Definitely, yes, and the stress on the staff was pretty— You could feel it in the air. And they were always being called to come back in on their days off. And so there was a lot of resentment, a lot of stressed-out people. It was just too much to cover everything.

Commissioner Drysdale

Thank you very much.

Lynn Kofler

You're welcome.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Good morning. I just have a couple of quick questions on the online course. Who was the author that would have been responsible for that online course?

Lynn Kofler

The author?

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Yeah, who. Was it the government?

Lynn Kofler

I think it was a government form, a little course that we had to take. If it wasn't government, then it would have been by the owners of the nursing care facility.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Was it accredited do you remember?

Lynn Kofler

I'm sorry?

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Was it an accredited education piece or was it just something that had been put together?

Lynn Kofler

No, it was just something they put together so that we could become "more informed" and be convinced that it would be better for us to take the vaccine than not take it.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

And my second question is: You may not have been working at this time, but I believe the media had this blitz in the middle of COVID about the military having to go into nursing homes. Did you experience or hear any information about that?

Lynn Kofler

I heard about that, but that was more in the Mississauga area and I work in the east. I live in Cobourg, so I work in nursing homes in that region.

I heard about the military coming in and saying how bad the situation was. I can tell you just from my own experience: I worked most of my career in hospitals and with the VON [Victorian Order of Nurses] community. And at the end of my career, I've been doing long-term care. And it is not a good picture, I think. I went to 10 to 12 nursing homes as an agency nurse and I can tell you that probably, there were three good ones and the rest were all just struggling, I think. And the patients were not getting top quality care at all.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you.

Lynn Kofler

You're welcome.

Geneviève Eliany

Thank you very much for attending today.

Lynn Kofler

Okay. Thank you.

[00:19:02]

Final Review and Approval: Jodi Bruhn, August 16, 2023.

The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method.

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