



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Red Deer, AB

Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 8: Grace Neustaedter

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Our next witness is Grace Neustaedter. Grace, can you state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name, please?

Grace Neustaedter

Sure. My name is Grace Neustaedter. My first name, G-R-A-C-E. Last name, N-E-U-S-T-A-E-D-T-E-R. I challenge any of you to repeat that.

Shawn Buckley

And I thought it was just the usual spelling. Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Grace Neustaedter

Yes, I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you worked as a nurse for a full 41 years.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

In fact, it's not just that you have a degree in nursing; you had gone and gotten a master's degree in nursing.

Grace Neustaedter

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

And your last 18 years of practice, you were what is called "a clinical nurse specialist," and you worked at a clinic that focused on pelvic health issues for women.

Grace Neustaedter

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

So COVID comes along, and there start to be murmurs about a mandate for vaccines by AHS [Alberta Health Services]. Can you tell us what your experience was and what happened?

Grace Neustaedter

In the very early months of COVID, I thought a vaccine sounded like a reasonable idea. But because of the advanced research courses I had taken in my master's degree and also the research projects I'd been personally involved in, I knew that the process of especially a new medication would take many years. So I thought maybe 5, 10 years down the road, a vaccine would be, maybe, a good idea. But I didn't expect anything to happen soon.

So when it started to be talked about more and more, and I realized that the due process for informed consent and for the trial of putting a new medication on the market wasn't going to be happening, as it should be, I became more and more concerned about it.

Personally speaking, I was very in turmoil as well because I do have a strong personal faith, which affects every aspect of my life. And when I'm in turmoil and anxiety, I know that I'm not being directed by God. So I knew that I couldn't take part in this as well. So there's sort of the two things that were happening.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Can I just slow you down?

Grace Neustaedter

Sure.

Shawn Buckley

Because my understanding is that you really did a dive into whether this is a good vaccine or not. Am I right about that?

Grace Neustaedter

Yes, I did look around—what was happening around the world, and a lot of that has been covered with the previous testimonies. And I was very uneasy because of the death rates not really rising and all those kinds of things.

Shawn Buckley

I didn't need you to go into the details, but I just wanted to confirm, you're not a regular nurse. You've got a master's in nursing; you know how to research. It's part of what you do for your job, and you had a hard look at this and had concerns. Is that fair to say?

Grace Neustaedter

I definitely did.

Shawn Buckley

But what I wanted you to talk about— Because when we were discussing this earlier, you were talking about how you tried to talk to other doctors and nurses and just the— I wrote down “medical acceptance” of the government narrative. I want you to talk about that and what you thought of that.

Grace Neustaedter

Well, I was actually astounded because as time went on, in just casual discussion in the clinic, it seemed that everyone was gung-ho, including the highly trained physicians I worked side by side with, who should know better than accepting a medication that hasn't been done due process. The rigorous research that needs to be done before releasing a medication to the public wasn't done. And yet, they didn't seem to blink an eye. They were all gung-ho over, as the time progressed, to taking the vaccine as quickly as they could. And I was astounded. I basically kept my mouth shut a lot. But the conversations around me were swirling at the disgust that they felt for those who chose not to be vaccinated.

Shawn Buckley

So let me just stop you. So here you've looked into it and you've got serious concerns.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And this would be based on credible information that you've been trained to evaluate.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And so not only are you not able to talk about it with doctors and nurses, but they're just enthusiastically adhering to the government narrative. So you couldn't even have discussions.

Grace Neustaedter

I couldn't have discussions. I didn't want to get into arguments or big fights with my colleagues, my friends, peers I'd worked with for many years.

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But it was becoming more and more vocal, to the point where there was this group of people at the front desk, physicians, clerical, all discussing— and I could hear it way down the hall in my office what they were discussing. And there was patients in the waiting room. And I walked up there and I looked at everyone. And I was thinking: You don't know if some of these patients waiting to see a doctor have been vaccinated or not. How can you be so vocal and so anti—so cruel in your words? It was astounding.

Shawn Buckley

So you mean they were running down unvaxxed people?

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. So my understanding is, eventually, you applied for a religious exemption.

Grace Neustaedter

I did. As I mentioned before, I felt no peace at all about going forward with this vaccination. When I make a decision and I know I'm in God's will, I do have peace. I'm well aware that partly due to all the medical stuff going on around and the research side of things, personally, I felt no peace about being forced to take a medication, even realizing it would cost me my job. It was take a job or take a hike. And all the work I had done: I had been deeply involved in many projects; I presented internationally. I've been on medical boards right up to and during COVID. I, actually, was very well known in my specific area. And just to throw it all away, I couldn't believe it was going to happen. I actually didn't believe it until it happened. They kept postponing the deadlines as well. But I just basically had to walk away from all the projects that I was in the middle of and my work and my career.

Shawn Buckley

Right. So basically, after 41 years, and that's an incredible amount of service as a nurse, you felt disposable. Is that fair to say?

Grace Neustaedter

Exactly. I was sharing with him previously— I hope it's okay. I received my 40-year award in the mail, a little plaque and a congratulations letter on my many, many years of faithful service and dedicated work, blah, blah, blah, on the very same day that I was no longer allowed to enter any AHS facility because I hadn't been vaccinated.

Shawn Buckley

December 15th, 2021.

Grace Neustaedter

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

Just so people understand: AHS sent you an award or a congratulation for 40 full years. So four decades of service, and by some ironic twist of fate, you receive that in the mail the very same day you are prohibited from continuing or basically attending on any AHS property?

Grace Neustaedter

That's exactly right.

Shawn Buckley

So what happened to your religious exemption? You applied.

Grace Neustaedter

I applied. I had been hearing by the grapevine that people who applied were not being granted any religious exemption. The same happened with me. I never heard back, one way or another, about it being received, acknowledged, or accepted. I again heard from a bit of a support group I was in that there was only one religious exemption of the many, many that were submitted, that was accepted. It was from someone, and I mean no prejudice here, but from a different culture and a different faith. So I didn't, yeah.

Shawn Buckley

And so a different faith, you mean a non-Christian faith.

Grace Neustaedter

That's right. Yeah.

Shawn Buckley

You also spoke, not just to the support group, but you spoke to your union about whether or not religious exemptions were being granted, and you were given the same information, were you not? That there was only one granted.

Grace Neustaedter

Exactly, that's exactly what I heard.

Shawn Buckley

And that was to a person of a non-Christian faith.

Grace Neustaedter

Mm-hmm. Yep.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding also is that you are a nurse, that you had your own patients.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

But you also did research.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And you did, basically, process projects and learning modules—that it was possible for you to work at home.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes, I had done so in the earlier months of COVID when our clinic was shut down for a period of time. I had an AHS laptop with all the programs needed. And we had reverted to doing a portion of our assessments of patients, the history part, over the phone. So when they eventually did arrive to the clinic, we could get on with business, so to speak. I could easily have continued with that with telephone reviews as well on how they were doing.

And I was, as I said before, in the middle of a variety of projects. I was very involved in creating educational programs, learning modules for all the new staff in our clinic. And I was hoping to revise them. We have videos that are on the AHS website that were used by patients across the province

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and actually, internationally. And I was just revising and modifying them. We were probably 75 per cent of the way through the project, and I could have finished a lot of these projects at home. It would have probably been six months or so of work at home. But I was not allowed to work at home, at this point, at the end, as I was not vaccinated. Other staff members were, but there was no rationale or explanation for why I wasn't.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so your manager wasn't going to allow you to work from home, although other people were allowed to work from home.

Grace Neustaedter

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

So you were forced off work as of December 15th, 2022. How did this affect you mentally and what happened with that?

Grace Neustaedter

I was blindsided in a way. I knew it was coming. But I couldn't believe it was really going to happen, that I wasn't allowed to continue my career. I was very distressed. I was very anxious. I had a new family doctor who I was seeing at that point who said, "You can't go back to work in this state of mind." So she put me on stress leave for a period of time. So I was. Then I ended up having a minor surgery, and I was off on medical leave for a bit, and then afterwards, I just couldn't go back. I had no idea what had happened to the work I was involved in. Who was doing it, or was anybody doing it? I couldn't stomach facing my colleagues after all that they had been saying. So I chose to just retire early and not go back. So a bit of a coward, perhaps, but I just couldn't do it.

Shawn Buckley

I'm just switching gears. My understanding is that you had been going to a church for 40 years. And can you tell us what your experience was with your church and COVID?

Grace Neustaedter

Me and my husband had been attending, our family had been attending this church. It was our faith community for over 40 years. We had lifelong friends there, basically. We were quite involved at various levels, including on the board. I was really astounded again at how many people there just seemed to say, "Okay, what the government says is what God wants us to do." They were entertaining the notion of vaccine passports to even enter the building. Masks were mandatory. My husband has a challenge with masks due to a genetic inherited condition of extra mucus. And so he would take it off, from time to time, when he was in the foyer, and people were swearing at him. People were complaining to the pastors, to the office.

It was a horrible situation. We felt like we were the only ones. And when he finally got a call from one of the leadership saying, "About the mask," the decision was made that we would just step aside for a period of time until this all calmed down. Our impression was people were far more concerned about their health and their comfort than actually doing what Jesus would want them to do. Jesus touched the lepers; he embraced them. He didn't shut out anyone.

And so we decided to step aside for a while, and we started attending a church that had remained open during COVID. There was many more like-minded people. It was a vibrant, growing community. We loved it. And so after a few months there, we finally decided that it was time to move on to this new church, that God had moved us somewhere else. So we left them all behind, unfortunately. Many of them are still friends, but it was very, very difficult for us.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding is that you have four adult children.

Grace Neustaedter

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Basically, there was a split in your family, at least with your children, in that half were vaccinated and half were not vaccinated.

Grace Neustaedter

Pretty much. Our oldest child decided not to be, along with her husband and their four children. Our second child decided to be vaccinated because they needed to keep their jobs. They didn't want to, but they felt they had no option. And then the third and the fourth embraced it. Because of that, there was quite a division. We weren't allowed to see our grandchildren for months at a time and only then, with a waste of money, with the PCR [Polymerase Chain Reaction] testing to prove we were negative.

We weren't allowed to see my husband's mother, who was in a seniors' complex. She was there alone. We would visit outside her window, basically, just to keep contact with her to some level. Thankfully, she was on a main floor. And then extended family as well. We would travel across provinces, and we weren't allowed in their homes.

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We were, basically, shunned because we were about the only people, except for one of my nephews, who chose not to be vaccinated. People just thought we were crazy.

Shawn Buckley

Right. My understanding is your husband and you spent two Christmases, just the two of you.

Grace Neustaedter

Pretty much, yes. Exactly.

I also lost a relationship with my previous family doctor, who was very gung-ho. I think there had been some COVID issues in her family. But she was rude to me. She put me down; she wouldn't speak to me. She basically walked out of the room and slammed the door. So I had no recourse but to try and find a new family doctor, which isn't an easy process these days. But she was very, very angry with me. So that relationship was lost as well. As well as friends that were so gung-ho. They just couldn't tolerate the fact that we weren't doing the same thing that they thought we should do. So they've cut us out of their lives.

Shawn Buckley

Now, do you know anyone that has either died or been disabled from COVID?

Grace Neustaedter

Personally, no, I do not. You hear of somebody's mother or aunt or something. But, no, I don't.

Shawn Buckley

But within your circle, you don't.

Grace Neustaedter

No.

Shawn Buckley

Within your circle, are you familiar with anyone who has died from what you believe to be the vaccine, just because of the circumstances?

Grace Neustaedter

Yes, a close friend of my husband's who, to keep peace in his marriage, was going along with his wife's desire to have him vaccinated. A couple of days after a booster, he went down to work out, and he collapsed from a heart attack. Two weeks ago, our next-door neighbour collapsed.

Shawn Buckley

How old was that gentleman?

Grace Neustaedter

That gentleman was in his early 70s. But he was in very good health.

Shawn Buckley

Ok.

Grace Neustaedter

A couple of weeks ago our next-door neighbour basically died suddenly, while having a visit with his wife. He was in his 50s, healthy man. In January, the neighbour of very close friends of ours—in one of our church groups, and we knew him actually, as well—died in his sleep. He was in his 40s. No reason, healthy man. So personally we have been affected by that, and we know of many people who say, "My uncle, my brother, my brother-in-law," as well. So not people we know personally. And maybe there's more. I've forgotten. I'm not sure.

Shawn Buckley

Right okay. Those are the questions I have for you. I'll ask if the commissioners have any questions. And there being no questions, Grace, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we sincerely thank you for coming and testifying today.

Grace Neustaedter

Thank you.

[00:18:04]

Final Review and Approval: Anna Cairns, August 30, 2023.

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