



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

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Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 13: Michelle Malkoske

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[00:00:00]

Kyle Morgan

Our next witness is Michelle Malkoske. Can I get you to spell your full name and state your full name also?

Michelle Malkoske

Hi, my name is Michelle, M—oh man, I'm going to cry already—M-I-C-H-E-L-L-E. And my last name is Malkoske, M-A-L-K-O-S-K-E.

Kyle Morgan

And Ms. Malkoske, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Michelle Malkoske

So help me God.

Kyle Morgan

Thank you. Where are you from?

Michelle Malkoske

I was born and raised here in Manitoba.

Kyle Morgan

In Winnipeg?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes.

Kyle Morgan

I understand you've been a nurse for about eight years, is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes. Yes, I've been a nurse for eight years. I did my training in Brandon and then one of my first jobs was here in WRHA [Winnipeg Regional Health Authority] community nursing.

Kyle Morgan

And can you tell us what professional body oversees you as a nurse, if you can recall what it's named.

Michelle Malkoske

Yeah, so I am governed by the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba. And then we also have the Manitoba Nurses Union.

Kyle Morgan

Okay. So I gather, from what you just told us, you were working for the WRHA in 2020. Is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Correct. Yes.

Kyle Morgan

And I understand you were doing homecare?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes.

Kyle Morgan

And you were doing that casually. Is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, I did not hold a position at the time. I was just casual, so I could pick up as I would like, as I was also homeschooling my kids.

Kyle Morgan

Can you tell us how many hours you would work every two weeks?

Michelle Malkoske

Yeah, I would usually work two to three shifts in a pay period. Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

Okay. Now, I gather that towards the end of 2021, like many others, there were some vaccine mandates that came in that affected your employment. Can you tell us about that?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, they had led up to this a few times. They had sent out memos saying that we're going to require to know if you're vaccinated or not or if you would submit to testing. And then I believe it was— Sorry, I have it written down, October 20th of 2021. I spoke with manager and he said, "Well, you need to fill out this form." And I said, "Okay, I will fill out this form to the best of my ability and I will submit it because I would like to continue to work."

So I filled out the form and I sent it in, and he says, "Oh, you need to check a box." I'm like, "Well, but I filled out the form the best I could, as you asked, and I'm submitting it to you this way." He said, "Well, let me get back to you then." And so, he got back to me and said, "Well, this is to confirm that all of your future shifts that you have signed up for—" oh, man, "all your future shifts are cancelled," they're just gone, "due to your decision to not disclose your vaccination status as per WRHA policy. This is, of course, something if you would like to change, you are welcome to sign up for shifts at any time as needed by both you and your employer."

So from that point on, I missed six months of work, which is about \$15,000 working part-time. Magically, in April, it was okay for me to return to work, and I was allowed to sign up for shifts again with no other questions.

Kyle Morgan

That would have been April 2022. Is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Correct.

Kyle Morgan

Now, who informed you? Do you recall who it was that informed you, regarding your placement on leave or inability to get shifts?

Michelle Malkoske

It was just my manager that was above me.

Kyle Morgan

Okay. Did you ever make any other inquiries or ask any other questions?

Michelle Malkoske

I submitted them a notice of liability. They just said, “Okay,” and I said, “Okay, well, I guess this is where we’re at.” They told me that I did have the option to test if I wanted to, and I declined and said, “I’ll just wait it out.” And it only took six months of waiting.

Kyle Morgan

Did you contact the professional college that you were a part of?

Michelle Malkoske

I did not contact the college, but they definitely were in contact with all of us. They had messaged us saying, “If you have made the personal choice not to be vaccinated for COVID, please continue to respect your clients’ rights to safe and ethical care,

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and to make choices that do not deprive them of access of competent nursing service.”
Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

So you would have lost your income during that time. Now, I understand you have children, is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, I have three children. I have a 15-year-old stepchild who, as we heard from Kyra, they had a rough time. And then I also have two smaller children that I was homeschooling at the time, as well.

Kyle Morgan

And are you married at the moment?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes.

Kyle Morgan

And can you tell us a bit about what happened with your husband’s work situation, also?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, he also was put on a leave of sorts as the facility where they get windows from was shut down in Toronto. So he had no income either, so we were without income for approximately three months. It was unfortunate. I know it was a decision that we did not take lightly, as I could go to work if I did agree to be tested. I would use other terms, but that’s probably not appropriate. But I did not agree to be tested, so we wanted to stand our ground. During that time, we took the kids to rallies and stuff because I thought it was important for them to also understand the gravity of what was happening around them and to them and to us.

Kyle Morgan

Now, I gather your husband was a window installer. Is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes. Sorry, he was actually the salesman who sells the windows; he didn't install them. Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

But he would attend customers' houses to do estimates, is that right?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, so in his attendance to people's homes, people would ask him prior to entering their home for his vaccination card. Just to give a quote on windows.

Kyle Morgan

So it would be fair to say he wasn't able to do those estimates and lost income.

Michelle Malkoske

Correct.

Kyle Morgan

Can you tell us a bit about the effect on your family? I guess you were homeschooling at the time?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, I was homeschooling my two younger children. That was a decision that I have always wanted to do. So for them it was not as bad. The 15-year-old had a much harder time because he couldn't go out and see his friends and all of the social things that come with being a teenager. For the two younger ones, the sports that they were in, they were allowed to go. However, I had to sit outside the emergency exit door to be able to watch them because I was not allowed in the facility.

Kyle Morgan

I understand there were some impacts on your wider family and some of those relationships. Can you tell us about those, too?

Michelle Malkoske

Yeah, I was quite outspoken about my views, personally. As a nurse, I also need to keep my professional guidelines, professional and ethical values, I suppose. So I did speak out to my family about how I felt.

I have nurses within the family who— They told me I should lose my licence and that I should not be practising as a nurse, which is awful to hear from your own family. Ah, it's crazy, just crazy. But yes, so there's some family that we do not speak to anymore and they

do not want to speak to us. It's unfortunate, but they are entitled to their own decisions and their own values and ideals as well.

Kyle Morgan

Do you know if there were other nurses, similar to you, who experienced the same thing as you? Or are you aware of other nurses in the same position as you?

Michelle Malkoske

Yes, I am, actually. I was very blessed to be with quite a few nurses who shared the same values and ideas as myself. I am so grateful to have those people to lean on. When we would show up at work, we knew who we could trust; we knew who we could talk to; we knew who we could confide in and that was such a blessing to have. As we went through this pandemic, you could walk into someone's home and they would point-blank ask you,

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"How many shots have you had?" And I'm like, "I'm just here to help you. It doesn't matter. You didn't care about anything else like that, six months beforehand. I can provide you service or I can leave, but I will not answer that question for you." That was definitely something tough to have to go through. I know I wasn't the only one.

A lot of the nurses would wear their "I am COVID-vaccinated" sticker, and to a lot of clients, they would see that as a sign that that nurse was okay. If you didn't have the sticker on your badge— I personally was questioned: "Well where's your vaccination sticker? I don't see it on your badge." It just blew my mind, but there was definitely a few other nurses in my office and also in my group that also have stories to share, I'm sure, and they'll come out as we go on with this.

Kyle Morgan

Do you know of any others that made the same decision as you?

Michelle Malkoske

I believe there was at least two others, maybe three, I think, that made the same decision as me to not test and to just not go to work and to sacrifice that because of their beliefs. I know that there's some that did not have that option. There was probably many who did not have that option and had to go in and test every two to three days. And I couldn't imagine having to choose that. That would be tough.

Kyle Morgan

Do you know if the staffing levels were affected by your loss for six months not working?

Michelle Malkoske

In my office specifically, I know it was tough for them. I know they lost a few. I got page-outs all the time about overtime and shifts that were available and I would respond back, "I'm available to work." And they're like, "Did you change your mind or are you going to sign a sheet?" And I said, "No." They're like, "Well, then, you can't." I'm like, "Well, I guess

it's not that important for people's care because I'm a very competent nurse and I'm willing to provide care."

Kyle Morgan

Do you have any thoughts about how this could have been handled differently?

Michelle Malkoske

That's a tough one. I have many thoughts on how it could have been handled differently. That would take a very long time to talk about. I just feel there could have been a better way. I feel like people tried to do the best with what they knew at the time. It may not be what I think was ideal.

I feel the discrimination, if you want to call it that, against people who refuse to just even show vaccination, whether they were or not is unnecessary and that it never should have come to that. If you need help and you need health care and you need service, you should be entitled to that, regardless of whether you're going to show a paper or not show a paper or wear a mask or not wear a mask. You deserve care. That's part of my creed as a nurse. Part of our thing is to provide the right person, the right medication at the right time, the right way, and also allow them the right to refuse.

Kyle Morgan

How is the work environment now?

Michelle Malkoske

Now, it's like it never happened, and in my opinion, I go to work and I love my job still. I have to show up, I have to wear a mask, but it's still a great job that I love. I've never been questioned about this, ever again. Nobody's ever come hounded at my door about it, ever again.

The only problem I'm having now is if I do go to apply for another job at other companies, there is a mandate, still, for a lot of companies that you need to provide a COVID vaccination and that's quite frustrating. So I'm grateful to have had this job and to not have been let go and that I was put on leave. Yeah, I'm very grateful for what I have right now, and I just hope that it can change in the future. And I guess, we'll see.

Kyle Morgan

You mentioned, is it other private companies that still have policies that require vaccinations?

Michelle Malkoske

Yeah, a lot of companies are able to make their own policies and procedures on how they want that to go. I was trying to look up the WRHA policy about it, but I couldn't find it.

[00:15:00]

I believe the last that I was aware of was that you needed to provide proof of vaccination as a new hire at the WRHA, but I am not 100 per cent certain on that. But I know one company that I did apply for in the last few weeks, they requested my vaccination papers for that.

Kyle Morgan

I don't believe I have any other questions. I'll ask the commissioners if they have any questions. Yes.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

You mentioned that you had two to three shifts per pay period. Can you tell me what the average age of your clients would be?

Michelle Malkoske

Most people that I see are between the ages of 50 and 80.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you.

Kyle Morgan

Any other questions? I want to thank you, Michelle, for your testimony, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry. Thank you very much.

Michelle Malkoske

Thank you.

[00:16:02]

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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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