



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 1

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EVIDENCE

Witness 9: Vittoria McGuire

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Vicki, I don't know if you can hear me. But if you can, if you can turn your camera on, that would be great. And also, your mic.

Vittoria McGuire

All right. Okay.

Shawn Buckley

There we go. We can see you and hopefully you can see us. I'd like to start by asking you to tell us your full name for the record and then spell your first and last name for the record.

Vittoria McGuire

Okay, it's Vittoria McGuire, V-I-T-T-O-R-I-A- M-C-G-U-I-R-E.

Shawn Buckley

And I'll ask if you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Vittoria McGuire

I will.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you've got a full 21 years working as an RPN. Not a regular RPN, but you were a full-scope RPN, which is something quite different than a regular RPN. Am I correct about that?

Vittoria McGuire

Well, just working to full scope—that I had additional courses, I could take blood and help out with things that. Yeah, worked to full scope.

Shawn Buckley

Right, okay.

Vittoria McGuire

Just did everything that was required and asked of me.

Shawn Buckley

Life has a lot of irony and no good deed goes unpunished, but my understanding is this: In December of 2019, just before COVID hits—you've worked for 21 years for the hospital—you get an award from the hospital, the award of excellence for nursing.

Vittoria McGuire

Yes, I did.

Shawn Buckley

Yeah, so—

Vittoria McGuire

Quite the irony, yeah.

Shawn Buckley

So just before all this starts, you're basically being recognized by your employer as an excellent nurse and actually being given an award—the only one getting it that year.

Vittoria McGuire

I'm not sure about that, but I was given the award for having the hospital values of compassion and cooperation, respect, professionalism. So yeah.

Shawn Buckley

Now when COVID hit, you took it very seriously. And can you share for the commissioners and the spectators basically the steps you took in your own home to ensure that everyone was safe and that?

Vittoria McGuire

Yeah. With watching what was going on on TV—and there was a lot of fear actually surrounding the whole thing. And having it, you know, come towards our hospital, our communities. We ended up putting up a tent on our front deck so that I would be able to protect my husband, who has diabetes, and I wouldn't bring anything home. So we had a tent erected on our deck. And I would come home and strip in the tent outside in March

and place my clothes in a bag and get a housecoat on, go into the house, clothes into the washing machine, housecoat into the washing machine, jump into the shower and made sure that I stayed in a separate room, just to make sure that I didn't bring anything home and infect anybody.

Shawn Buckley

So basically, so you slept in a different room than your husband—

Vittoria McGuire

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Just to make sure that your family was being protected.

Vittoria McGuire

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you said there was a lot of fear at the beginning. Can you tell us about the fear in the hospital that you worked at?

Vittoria McGuire

Well, there was a lack of PPE [personal protective equipment] and the nurses actually purchased facial shields themselves. We were thinking that we're going to be having this wave come and that we weren't going to be prepared for it. So yeah, there was a lack of N95s, so when we would come in to the hospital—

Shawn Buckley

And we're just waiting a second. You froze, and we're just waiting for you to unfreeze.

[00:05:00]

Vicki, I don't know if you can hear us, but we're having that experience of freezing, so we're just going to check a couple of settings for a second.

So perhaps what we'll do is, we have another witness here who is in person, Mr. Remus Nasui. Remus, can we get you to take the stand, and we'll try to get Vicki back on.

Oh, I'm sorry, we're back on?

Vittoria McGuire

Okay, does that work?

Shawn Buckley

Yeah, sorry, I don't know what happened there. You just froze. But you were basically talking about the culture in the hospital, that nurses had purchased their own face shields, and then you froze. So if you can kind of just pick it up from there. And then where I want you to go next is, tell us what you were thinking at the beginning and then whether your opinion changed. Because you're taking big steps at the beginning: you're changing in a tent; you're sleeping in a different room; you're telling us about fear in the hospital. So if you can carry on.

Vittoria McGuire

Yeah, the lockdowns happened, so there wasn't really many people in the hospital—like visitors and whatnot. The hospital became quite quiet. And so there was a lot of downtime, and what we were expecting to happen didn't seem to come to fruition. We had seen other places, you know, that the pandemic—the waves were coming in and people were so busy. And time was passing and I didn't really see it happening.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so just so that I understand it—because I think most of us are watching the news and we're being told that the hospitals are being run.

Are you telling us that wasn't the experience you were having?

Vittoria McGuire

No, not at the beginning. Like I said, in the lockdowns, the hospital was quite quiet. We were receiving a lot of accolades. We had, you know, people were supporting us a great deal with pots and pans banging. We had emergency vehicle parades come by the hospital. We had people donating food and it was wonderful feeling like such a hero. And like I said, we were just waiting on pins and needles for this thing to hit.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, and then basically the vaccine mandates came.

Vittoria McGuire

Yeah. It was slowly coming into—I mean, we worked for a year and a half without anything, with concerns to vaccines. We worked together side-by-side for a year and a half and it was fine. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary that we were really experiencing. And then, I would say, the government came up with the mandates pushing the vaccine. I guess it was in September that the mandates came out, but the hospital was already starting to prepare people for taking the vaccine. It seemed to be that was the route that we were going to take. I remember seeing a CPR course that was available in-house and that was in the spring. And to attend it you had to be vaccinated. So actually, that was before it was mandatory. So I was seeing the direction that was being taken, that they wanted to get the vaccine into everyone.

At that point, I remember talking to a union representative. And I had said to them:

[00:10:00]

“Are you going to represent me if I decide not to take this?” And she actually kind of laughed at me. Because I had said, “if I get fired for not taking this.” And she had actually started laughing and she said, “Oh, it’s not going to get to that.” And yeah, sure enough, it ended up that direction.

Shawn Buckley

Did the hospital try to communicate with you by email and social media and things like that about the mandate? Or the vaccine?

Vittoria McGuire

We were getting a lot of emails. I remember that there was also, like, an early bird— If you got vaccinated early, you could get into an early bird prize. They had furniture and cash prizes if you had gotten your vaccination early.

Shawn Buckley

Just wait. I just want to make sure that I heard you correctly. Are you saying that your employer, who is a hospital, had an early bird draw for staff so that if you got vaccinated early you were put in a draw to win prizes, such as furniture or cash?

Vittoria McGuire

That’s right.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. Were there other things that the hospital did to try and encourage you to get vaccinated?

Vittoria McGuire

There were emails that came regularly saying that that was the best route to go.

Shawn Buckley

Did you see anything at the hospital that would suggest that vaccinated and unvaccinated people were being treated the same? Or differently?

Vittoria McGuire

Not with co-workers. Like I said, we worked side-by-side for about a year and a half with no issues. It wasn’t until I started seeing, like I said earlier, about having to take a course to participate that I had to be vaccinated. So that’s when I started to see that.

Shawn Buckley

What about with patients that were vaccinated and unvaccinated?

Vittoria McGuire

I know that there were some incidences where patients had asked for a vaccinated nurse. Only one that I know that was close to me—it was a co-worker—and she had said to the patient that— She didn't reveal her status. And she just said to the patient, "We're not going to play this game," and shut it down.

Shawn Buckley

Now eventually you got suspended. Can you tell us about that?

Vittoria McGuire

That would have been October 12th, when the hospital became 100 per cent vaccinated for staff. There was an unpaid leave of absence for all employees that were not vaccinated.

At that point, we had left the hospital. They had shut down our capabilities to use our emails, computer. We couldn't get in to see our pay stubs or our schedules. So we were totally shut out from the hospital for those three weeks.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, you say "we." You mean you and fellow healthcare workers?

Vittoria McGuire

Those that decided not to take the injection at work, yeah.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, did some of the ones that you know then change their mind?

Vittoria McGuire

Yeah, there was a campaign that started from the hospital over the course of the next three weeks. Purolator would pull into the driveway and deliver a package coming from the hospital stating that we were being non-compliant; that this was continued disciplinary actions; that if we didn't show proof of vaccine, we would be terminated; that our actions were on our personal files. And yeah, we had a certain date—I believe it was in November sometime—that we had to come up or that termination would occur.

[00:15:00]

So yeah, a lot of people did end up going back to the hospital after that period of time.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, and you didn't and then you were terminated.

Vittoria McGuire

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Were you able to get EI?

Vittoria McGuire

No. Actually, everyone that was terminated tried. And everyone was refused, everyone was refused. So there was no safety net for the people terminated. Even though we paid into the system for many years, that safety net was not available to the people who refused taking the injection.

Shawn Buckley

Now, once you were terminated and you couldn't get EI, did you experience any stigma for being what I call an anti-vaxxer?

Vittoria McGuire

Well, there was a lot of names, yes. A lot of names, prejudice, you know, like you said, "anti-vaxxer." It was a difficult time, that period. I didn't even tell people that I was terminated. I told people that I took early retirement, which I did. I took my pension at a reduced rate. But I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed that— Yeah, all these labels.

I was in the job that was into service of others and always helping others. And receiving that award I kind of think tells you how much I loved my job. And so when I was in need, it was just like there was no one there for those people that spent a great deal of their life helping other people.

Shawn Buckley

Were there any effects on your mental health?

Vittoria McGuire

Everyone that was terminated had the sleepless nights. And your world changes on it, your world changed on a dime. Which is— You understand that, but to accept it is a different thing. So yeah, there's a lot of anxiety. How are bills going to get paid? How, you know— I heard a lot of parents who had small children, even the whole family unit suffered a great deal. Why is mom so sad? Yeah, just— People ended up having to sell their homes. Some people sold everything and left Canada. So yeah, it was a very difficult couple of months afterwards. We were part of the Ontario— Oh goodness, I can't even think of the acronym right now.

Shawn Buckley

United Ontario Healthcare Workers?

Vittoria McGuire

Thank you, yes. We were part of that. And we had a chat group, so we were helping each other out. People would— If they had extra of something they would help each other out. And it was a good place for people to help voice some of their anxiety. So...

Shawn Buckley

If we ever face something like this again, how would you suggest that things be done differently?

Vittoria McGuire

Well, most definitely. Decisions were made—a lot of decisions were based on fear. And I think that that was the worst part of it. Healthy, good, smart decisions never come from that place. The crisis seemed to build and everyone had angst and were anxious. And decisions were made because they felt pressured. I had a nurse tell me that they took the injection and felt violated but they were the only breadwinner in their home. I had another nurse tell me—a single mom---that she didn't have the convenience of having convictions, you know. People did things that they didn't want to.

[00:20:00]

And again, it was pressure and coercion.

We really did have to, I think, slow down and look at both sides of a story. There can't be just one view. And being able to look at something from both sides: as a nurse, one of the most important things you can do is advocate. If something wasn't working for your patients, you would voice that. You would go to the doctor. You would say that this isn't working, the treatment or drug. But you had a voice and you were able to, like I said, advocate and show a different perspective.

But it didn't seem that you were allowed to in this—

Shawn Buckley

And Vittoria, you froze again. And I'd say we were at the end of your evidence. If you can hear us, I thank you on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry for attending. And I can say that your evidence was very helpful.

[00:21:19]

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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