



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Truro, NS

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

Witness 4: Amie Johnson

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Ches Crosbie

Amie Johnson, do you affirm that you will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Amie Johnson

Yes, I do.

Alison Steeves

Good morning, Amie.

Amie Johnson

Good morning.

Alison Steeves

Can you state your full name, where you are from, and your occupation?

Amie Johnson

Sure. So my name is Amie Johnson. I'm from Chester, Nova Scotia. I am a dental hygienist, currently unemployed.

Alison Steeves

And since when have you been unemployed?

Amie Johnson

February of 2022, so just over a year.

Alison Steeves

So in February 2022, at that point, how long had you worked as a dental hygienist?

Amie Johnson

I was three months shy of 22 years.

Alison Steeves

Twenty-two years. And how do you like being a dental hygienist?

Amie Johnson

I love being a dental hygienist actually. I love interacting with people, helping them, you know, making sure that people are taking good care of their oral health, and which in turn is their overall health. It was a great profession.

Alison Steeves

Back in early 2020, were you employed as a dental hygienist at that time?

Amie Johnson

Yes, I was.

Alison Steeves

And who was your employer?

Amie Johnson

Chester Family Dental, Dr. Natasha Zink.

Alison Steeves

How long had you been at that place?

Amie Johnson

Just shy of 22 years.

Alison Steeves

So right out of school.

Amie Johnson

I went there straight out of university. Yeah, same office, same employee, same employer.

Alison Steeves

And how would you describe your experience working there up to that point?

Amie Johnson

It was great. There was ten of us, all women. We were a cohesive group. We worked together five days a week, you know, ate lunch together, went out to lunch, went out for birthdays, you know, parties, all that stuff.

Alison Steeves

I imagine being there 22 years, you would know the patients really well.

Amie Johnson

Extremely well. And you know, that's the other thing too, the patients became my friends as well, you know. Like, a lot of patients I would see every four to six months, regularly. I would see, you know, between 12 to 15 patients a day for five days a week.

Alison Steeves

How big is Chester, Nova Scotia?

Amie Johnson

Chester in the winter is about 3,000, 3,500 people. In the summer, we can go up to like 12,000 people.

Alison Steeves

Okay, so people know each other pretty well.

Amie Johnson

Yeah, we're a pretty small-knit community. We're about halfway between Halifax and Lunenburg.

Alison Steeves

So in 2020, as you begin to hear about COVID-19, were you concerned?

Amie Johnson

Initially, yes, I was. So dentistry doesn't fall under health care. So we fall more under the Nova Scotia Dental Board, and of course, for me, the Dental Hygienists Association. So in March of 2020 we were actually shut down prior to the province actually shutting down schools, and you know, the nursing homes and things like that because they were taking it very seriously. It was very unknown. They were worried about transmission. Obviously, we deal with germs, people's mouths, so you know it was pretty important to kind of figure out what was going on. And yeah, so we shut down early March and didn't reopen until June of 2020. So we were shut down for a few months there.

Alison Steeves

So that was a dental board decision?

Amie Johnson

Yes, it was.

Alison Steeves

So you would have been at home during that time?

Amie Johnson

Yes, I was.

Alison Steeves

And so when the vaccines became available, did you choose to take any of the vaccines?

Amie Johnson

No, I did not.

Alison Steeves

And why not?

Amie Johnson

Well, when they first started talking about the vaccines, on a positive note you're thinking, okay, this is a good thing. But then you start doing your own research, and you realize, you know, COVID has a 99 per cent plus survival rate. And so something that was so rushed, the vaccine was so rushed, and experimental, I was just like, you know what? I think the previous gentleman that was up earlier said, "Let's just wait, I'm going to hold back." And that was kind of my initial reaction, was like, you know what, I'll just wait, let other people take it and kind of iron out the kinks and see what's going on. And then I quickly realized this wasn't for me.

Alison Steeves

And what sources did you consult in making that decision?

Amie Johnson

Well, I'm a numbers person. I like statistics. So you know, initially I would, you know, check like the dash, the Nova Scotia dashboard, and Stats Canada, and even the World Health Organization, but the numbers just never seem to add up. Like these people were vaccinated, but the numbers keep getting bigger. And then the biggest red flag for me was when they put the vaccine passports in. And so the exposure sites here in Nova Scotia— We have the exposure site website, you know, don't go there, don't go there. And all the exposure sites are places where people that were unvaccinated couldn't go. So how are we the problem? How are the unvaccinated the problem when the exposure sites are all vaccinated people? So I quickly realized that the vaccine doesn't stop transmission. And from my dental standpoint, the only reason why I would take the vaccine is to protect my patients.

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That I wouldn't want to transmit COVID to a patient. But if the vaccine doesn't stop transmission, what is the point of taking the vaccine, if its effectiveness for severity of disease is still questionable and doesn't stop transmission?

Alison Steeves

So during that time, how did you feel about the way the media was portraying COVID-19 and the vaccines?

Amie Johnson

Well, it's actually very disheartening. It makes you question everything that the media said over the last years: very biased, very fear mongering. Again, I worked from June of 2020 until February of 2022 through this whole pandemic. I've seen 10, 15 patients a day, and a majority of them are scared to death. And that's really sad, that they're scared of something that does have a 99 per cent survival rate. And we don't know much about the vaccine, and they're putting so much faith in the vaccine.

Alison Steeves

So when you made that decision not to take the vaccine, did you share that with your co-workers?

Amie Johnson

Absolutely. You know, at lunchtime or just in random conversations. And my co-workers weren't so receptive of that.

Alison Steeves

Can you describe a bit more in detail just how this decision happened?

Amie Johnson

Sure. At the start, when the vaccine started coming out, I would say, "No, I think you guys should hold off, wait." Because, again, dentistry doesn't fall under health care. But because we're such high exposure, we were given the opportunity to get the vaccines quite early on with the nurses and the doctors. So nine out of 10 of us were right there, the first ones in line getting the vaccine. And people were trying— My co-workers were like, "You should do it, you should do it." But then that quickly turned to, instead of just saying, "You should do it, you should do it," to anger, animosity, alienation. I would go to work just to work, and there was no more going out to lunch with my co-workers or talking to them on the weekend or, yeah.

Alison Steeves

Why do you think that they reacted that way? What do you think? Why were they telling you to get the vaccine, and why were they upset?

Amie Johnson

Well, they felt that I was not only putting my patients in danger but also them and being irresponsible. Just because I'm unvaccinated doesn't mean that I don't take my job

seriously, or I don't care about my patients. But that's how they were perceiving it as, that I was being selfish and only thinking about myself.

Alison Steeves

And you said you're no longer employed. So were there mandates?

Amie Johnson

So because I fall under the Dental Board and the Nova Scotia Dental Hygiene Association—Both the Board and the Association did not mandate vaccines. Both, of course, were recommending vaccines, but we were not legislated to get to get a vaccine because it didn't stop transmission. So their official statement was the vaccine doesn't stop transmission, so there's no benefit for the patient. I'm sure all of you have gone to the dentist, so you know that we use universal precautions pre-COVID, and then those universal precautions were only amped up even further. We had to wear gowns. We had to double mask, face shields, goggles, you know, gloves. There were new protocols on scrubs. We would have to change them even if we left the office even for a minute. It was very extreme. But no vaccine mandate.

So then at Christmas, December of 2021, my employer came to me, and she officially said, "You need to get vaccinated." And I said, "No." And I said, "Let's have this discussion about the vaccine," And she said, "I'm not discussing it. You don't follow the science." And I said, "Okay." So then, when we came back after Christmas, because we closed for three weeks over Christmas, one of my co-workers got sick and tested positive for COVID. And she was triple vaxxed and was extremely sick for three weeks—very, very ill. But one of the protocols that we did have was that, to come back to work, all of the employees had to have negative PCR tests: to come back to work before the office reopened after my co-worker had COVID.

So reluctantly, I went to go get my PCR test and it came back positive. I was totally asymptomatic. I never got sick. And so when I called my employer Dr. Natasha Zink to tell her, she was not happy obviously. But because I was unvaccinated, I had to wait the full 14 days of quarantine, even though I was asymptomatic. And at that time the protocol was only down to a week, but because I was unvaccinated, I had to have the full two weeks off. And so I was set to go back to work on a Monday. And a couple days later, before I was getting ready to go back to work, she called me

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and she fired me. And she said that I was putting my patients at risk, and that because I wouldn't get vaccinated, I was no longer to work there.

Alison Steeves

So you were immediately terminated.

Amie Johnson

I never went back to work after testing positive for COVID.

Alison Steeves

And did she fire you with cause, or did she pay you—?

Amie Johnson

Well, she said that first, I was putting my patients in danger. And secondly, she said there would be a shortage of work because patients wouldn't see me because I was unvaccinated. And the hypocrisy of the whole thing is that my co-worker who had COVID was extremely ill for three weeks, was triple vaccinated, still has a job; but I'm unvaccinated and tested positive for COVID but was completely asymptomatic and I don't have a job. After 22 years, yeah.

Alison Steeves

So your income ceased immediately.

Amie Johnson

Yes, she did pay me some sick leave for those first few days when we were waiting for the test results for the PCR test, and I did get my three weeks of vacation pay.

Alison Steeves

How did it feel to be let go from that position?

Amie Johnson

I mean, it was devastating. Like I said, you don't work somewhere for 22 years and not love it, right? And it wasn't a job; it was a career. It was my identity. So it was really, really hard. Really, really hard. Not to mention financially hard. I made almost \$80,000 a year, and that's a lot of money to lose in a household. It put a lot of pressure on my husband to make sure that he could pull up his socks and help more as well.

Alison Steeves

So since then, have you sought employment elsewhere?

Amie Johnson

Yes, I have. So like I said earlier, I do live in a small community. There is two other dental offices within about 15 minutes of us. So one of the offices, one of the hygienists was retiring, and I had—you know, from a friend—had heard that. So I reached out to—it's called Chester Dental Clinic, Dr. Andrea, via email, and asking her if she would be interested in me possibly working there. And she did reply with a lovely email. I actually brought it today. But when I applied for the job, I never mentioned my vaccine status because it's not really anyone's business. So then, when she replied back to me, she already knew my vaccine status and would not hire me. And I have the email [Exhibit TR-26a]: would not hire me solely based on the fact that I wasn't vaccinated. So that was one.

Alison Steeves

Would you like to read the email?

Amie Johnson

Yeah, sure I can. She says, "Thank you for reaching out to me regarding our soon-to-be-vacant dental hygienist position. I do apologize for my late response." Because it did take

her a few days. “At this point, I am unable to offer you a position with us. Professionally, I have to consider the reality of alienating patients and staff because of your vaccination status,” which I had never told her, so I find that very interesting. “Unfortunately, Nova Scotia seems to stand alone as the world moves on. Personally, I could not disagree more with the public health protocols, having sat on the Return to Work Committee for COVID-19 on behalf of the NSDA. I am absolutely appalled at what has transpired in our once-free profession. We are beholden to ridiculous public health directives. The hypocrisy of mandating vaccines and masking in dental office defies logic, common sense and science. It did at the onset and most certainly does not presently. I admire you for your courage and your stance on personal freedoms and standing up against tyranny. I am sorry for this, that it cannot work out for us at this time. Wishing you all the best, Dr. Andrea.”

Alison Steeves

So supportive of you—

Amie Johnson

Supportive of me, but wouldn't employ me.

Alison Steeves

And again, there were no mandates. She wasn't required—

Amie Johnson

No, and again, Dr. Zink when she fired me, and Dr. Andrea as well. These are their sole ideas or opinions because the Dental Board does not regulate vaccinations.

Alison Steeves

And did you try—

Amie Johnson

So the third dental office in my area is Mahone Bay Dental. So in November of 2022, they had a vacancy come up. So I went in for the interview, and three days later I was offered the job via email. And she sent me the contract. We worked out all the details. I was set to start December, I think it was the 17th. And on December 10th, she called me because she heard through the grapevine that I was unvaccinated. Because during the interview, it was not discussed. During the contract that she had given me and sent to me via email, not discussed -

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but she had heard that I was unvaccinated. She wanted to confirm that, and of course I'm not going to lie about my status. I'm not ashamed of it, nor embarrassed, although it is not anyone's, you know: it's not their business.

But so she said, “If it's true,” and I said, “Yes, it is.” And she said, “Well, I'll still offer you the job, but I'll put you in a three-month probationary period. And if patients will continue to see you knowing of your vaccine status, and it all works out, then I will offer you a full-time job.” And I said, “No, thank you.” And I walked away.

Alison Steeves

And why did you say, “No thank you?”

Amie Johnson

Well, first of all, again, it’s not anyone’s business what my vaccine status is. Second of all, I didn’t want to be put through that torture again. And like I said, I see 10 to 15 patients a day, not knowing, is this the patient that’s going to go to—her name is Dr. Sarah Fakhraldeen—go to Dr. Sarah, and say, “Hey, I don’t want to see her anymore because she’s unvaccinated.” So yeah, I was really reluctant to do that. So I said no. And I declined.

Alison Steeves

So you’ve worked as a dental hygienist for 22 years.

Amie Johnston

Yeah.

Alison Steeves

How long have you been in Chester?

Amie Johnson

Twenty-two years. Well, actually I grew up in Chester, but moved away for a few years, and then after, when I got my job.

Alison Steeves

And is there anywhere else in Chester you could work as a dental hygienist?

Amie Johnson

Those are the only dentist offices within a half an hour. So yeah, I’d have to start traveling. And again, I was spoiled rotten for 22 years. I walked to work.

Alison Steeves

So outside the workplace, did the vaccine passports have much of an impact on your life?

Amie Johnson

Absolutely, besides the obvious of not being able to go to the gym or the movies or restaurants and things like that. But more importantly, in my house, over that period, we missed two family funerals and two weddings.

Alison Steeves

And can you give a few more details about that?

Amie Johnson

Sure, well, one of the funerals was my husband's uncle, who was like a father to him, who's very special to us. Coincidentally, he did pass away within a week of his second shot, but we were unable to go to the church service. They asked my husband to be a pallbearer, but when they found out that he was unvaccinated and we were unable to go to the church service, obviously he couldn't do that. They did have a graveside service, so we were able to go to the graveside service because it's outside, and this was actually last February of 2022. So we did go to the graveside service, but we offended family members by going, by being present. It has created a huge rift in our family. There are family members that don't speak to us any longer over us going to the funeral. Yeah.

Alison Steeves

So they were upset that you went to the outdoor service.

Amie Johnson

Again, you know, the misconception that just because we're unvaccinated, we're spreading this horrible disease to everyone, right? And it's really sad. And you know, if you look at the numbers, people that are vaccinated are the ones getting COVID, currently. And I go back to my own experience at my work office. You know, it's okay for a triple-vax person to get COVID, but it's not okay for me to get COVID, or even be around people.

Alison Steeves

So would you say that the measures impacted relationships in your life?

Amie Johnson

Absolutely, it did, yeah. Yeah, unfortunately.

Alison Steeves

Do you have children?

Amie Johnson

I do, I have two children. They're both grown. And this has in fact affected them as well, very much so. My daughter, in September of 2021, started her first year of university at Dalhousie. She was accepted into the Bachelor of Science program, the accelerated program, and within weeks of her starting, they mandated that all nursing students had to be double vaccinated. So she chose not to get vaccinated. So she left the nursing program and switched to a Bachelor of Science. And her hopes were then to be a naturopath. And shortly thereafter, Dalhousie decided that all students had to be double vaccinated, so we were kind of in a bit of a dilemma there. But then they transitioned to online learning. So she was able to do all her courses online. So we were happy with that. But then she started receiving letters coercing her, threatening her to get double vaccinated or she wouldn't be able to complete her year at school [Exhibit TR-26b]. And it turns out they came true. So she lost all of her tuition money. And she wasn't able to get the credits.

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Alison Steeves

So they just told her to leave.

Amie Johnson

Yeah. She wasn't able to go to in-person to Dalhousie to write her exams. So she did the courses all year long online. And then when at the end of the term, when she came to do the exams, they wouldn't make special accommodation for her because she was not able to be on the premises without being double vaccinated.

Alison Steeves

Would that affect her transcripts?

Amie Johnson

Yes, she did get fails, like F's. But they said that, if you come back and take that same course again, they would replace the failure. So yeah.

And so my son and my husband, they own a construction company called Nauss and Son Construction. They were also— It was the fall of 2021; they were doing a project on an Airbnb owned by Colin and Karen McDonald in Chester. And it was a large project: they intended to be there probably about five months. They were about halfway through, and it was right before Christmas of 2021. And the manager of the property, his name is Victor Lovett, he heard apparently through the grapevine that my husband and son were unvaccinated. And he arrived on the job site, livid, irate. Kicked them off the job site, told them to take their tools and that they were fired. So you know, it's very difficult living in a small community because everyone knows everything and the defamation of character as well that people talk behind— And my husband and son being self-employed, you know, we worry about their business. Jacqueline, my daughter, has now since opened up her own business, Coastal Charcuterie, doing charcuterie boards. And you know, she's doing really well and really successful, but you wonder at what point sometime that might come back, again.

Alison Steeves

And Amie, I just have one final question.

Amie Johnson

Sure.

Alison Steeves

Do you regret your decision?

Amie Johnson

No, not at all. My health is far more important than any money. And again, I'm at the age that I'm approaching 50. So I was in a position that I was able to stick to my guns and my morals and make a choice for myself and my health and my family. But I feel horrible for people that are younger, or even older, that have to feel the pressure to cave to that coercion. And I'm not going to say that maybe when I was in my late 20s, early 30s and had

two small kids and great big mortgage and car payments that I might have caved as well. And I was just really fortunate that I was in a position that I was able to, you know, continue to stick to my moral standards.

Alison Steeves

Thank you, and I'll turn it over to the commissioners if you have any questions.

Commissioner Massie

Well, thank you very much for your testimony. I have a question about your clinical, the dentist: Were they asking, for a patient to be treated, that they show vaccination?

Amie Johnson

No. At the dental office you didn't have to be vaccinated to come. Because again, dentistry kind of falls under health care, but it doesn't, so we did not ask people their vaccination status. And all people were treated equal.

Commissioner Massie

Okay, thank you.

Alison Steeves

Thank you, Amie.

Amie Johnson

Thank you.

[00:23:26]

Final Review and Approval: Jodi Bruhn, August 3, 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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