



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Saskatoon, SK

Day 1

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EVIDENCE

Witness 4: Ann McCormack

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Our next witness today is Ann McCormack. Ann, can you please state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name.

Ann McCormack

My name is Ann McCormack, A-N-N M-C-C-O-R-M-A-C-K.

Shawn Buckley

And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ann McCormack

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding is you have a Bachelor's in Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science from the University of Alberta.

Ann McCormack

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

And you practised as a pharmacist for seven years.

Ann McCormack

About seven years, yes.

Shawn Buckley

And then, for family reasons, you let your licence lapse.

Ann McCormack

Right.

Shawn Buckley

But you went back as a pharmacy assistant, unregulated, in May of 2020.

Can I ask you what happened to the previous employee?

Ann McCormack

Oh, sure. I had heard about this job. I was home on the farm and the lady that I had replaced was so afraid of catching COVID that she couldn't come to work anymore. She quit.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. And now, my understanding is that the pharmacy that you were working at was not selected initially to receive the vaccine. Can you explain to us, kind of what happened, and what happened with the pharmacy across the street?

Ann McCormack

Sure, I'll try to. I think it's a large picture where a competition atmosphere was set up so that the vaccines were promoted. But I think it started very early at a federal level, where the federal Conservatives under O'Toole sort of accused the federal Liberals under Trudeau of not being able to obtain any vaccines. And then the trickle down was that, when these doses were finally procured, provinces would then distribute them.

And so early doses of vaccine of all the brands were initially given to drugstores that could handle a high volume based on the previous year's flu vaccines that they were distributing and injecting into people. We were a smaller drugstore and the drugstore across the street had a larger volume. They had a larger square footage, more staff.

And so there became— The managers almost sort of had their nose out of joint that the government actually selected one business over another. As a patient, if you chose to get the vaccine, you couldn't necessarily just go to your regular druggist—especially if you had a date to get across the border, for instance, to Yuma. It really set up a competition and it took the individual's choice of who they went to for their health, I suppose you'd say. It took that choice away from the individual to some degree.

Shawn Buckley

Now, this is a smaller town, am I correct?

Ann McCormack

About 1,400 people. In Alberta too, by the way.

Shawn Buckley

Yes, so I presume that—I imagine it's the same in the city, but more so in a rural environment—the pharmacist gets to know the patient and is familiar with the patient's medical history.

Ann McCormack

Oh, absolutely. That's the best part. I left being a pharmacist for lots of reasons but the only thing that I really, really miss is seeing the same people every day, doing their blood pressure. You know, we call them the senators. All the old gentlemen would go and get their blood pressures done then they'd go for coffee and compare their numbers, right? It's a social thing. It's a wonderful, wonderful set-up. It is a really loving environment. Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Right. But the thing is, with this policy where people have to go to a different pharmacy, they would be going to a pharmacist that does not know their medical history and record. So that pharmacist wouldn't know if there's something contraindicated with taking the vaccine or whether there should be a specific concern.

Ann McCormack

That's true to some degree. To some degree, they're obligated to do some history on that person but you are sort of walking in cold, for sure. I mean, it is much nicer to know a medical history on somebody, yes.

Shawn Buckley

Now, was the incentive structure different for the COVID vaccines than other vaccines?

Ann McCormack

Speaking to Alberta again, I don't know what you'd call it, a traditional vaccine like Measles-Mumps-Rubella or a TWINRIX vaccine for travel,

[00:05:00]

the drug store would bill the provincial insurance company \$13 per dose. That's your dispensing fee. And so for COVID, we billed Alberta Blue Cross \$25 per dose. Nearly double.

Shawn Buckley

Now you were wanting to say some things about informed consent. So I'm hoping— And please take your time with this because as a pharmacist you actually would be the person, back when you were licensed, actually dispensing drugs. So pharmacists are highly trained in what informed consent is. And I think you were here earlier today when Dr. Christian was speaking about the Nuremberg Code and informed consent.

Can you explain to us what basically are the elements of informed consent and why they're important?

Ann McCormack

Well, I'll go back to what Dr. Christian said: It is the absolute bedrock of patient care. It ought to be the bedrock of banking, of every single way we serve one another as humans.

Informed consent in Alberta is: First of all, you must have the capacity to understand the information before you consent. If you are given every reason in the world to do something, to buy something, to inject something, to ingest something, and you still choose not to, that is your prerogative. That is your choice. However, first of all in Alberta, you must be able to have the capacity to form consent and then you may give your consent.

It's a little bit different in Saskatchewan, in that there is a duty to ensure that the information is understood, and also that a signature is not the same thing as informed understanding and consent.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Now, I don't know, what is the legal drinking age in Saskatchewan? Is it 18?

Ann McCormack

Is it 19 in Saskatchewan maybe?

We live near Lloydminster, so we're a border city that straddles Alberta and Saskatchewan. And many of the health mandates that came up, like the legal age to go into a liquor store or whatever, would be dictated by Saskatchewan. However, lottery and that kind of thing, the VLT that you'd play while you're drinking, was dictated by Alberta. So it was crazy, really.

Shawn Buckley

But it's around 18 or 19.

Ann McCormack

Eighteen or nineteen, whatever, yeah.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. It's just, we had some evidence earlier today about: How does a 13-year-old be able to consent? That it's just not possible. So that would speak to the capacity issue that you've raised.

Ann McCormack

Yes. Even the language that is used to explain side effects to a person, it's just being a nice person. It's just being a decent individual, a moral individual, regardless of whether you've taken an oath or not. Explain things in a way that people can understand and try and ensure that it is understood.

Shawn Buckley

Commissioners, I'll just let you know that Ms. McCormack has provided me with a screenshot of the Saskatchewan requirements. But I'm going to ask David if he can pull up my screen, which is the Alberta College of Pharmacy Requirements. And can you speak to us about a sentence there: "Generally, for a patient's consent to medical treatment to be acceptable—" And then there's three concepts.

Can you speak to those and explain those to us?

Ann McCormack

Well, it has to be voluntary. You know that saying about, "No jab, no job?" I mean, that is coercion. If you threaten someone's income or their ability to put food on the table for their children because you haven't taken an injection that either you're not aware of, or not sure of, or have a question about, that is coercion. That is not freely given informed consent.

We've talked a little bit about the capacity to form consent and that the patient must be properly informed. I don't know that even a lot of the health professionals have been properly informed. The way medications are promoted—and doctors are sometimes educated and pharmacists certainly are educated—is through drug reps.

A drug rep usually has a Bachelor of Commerce degree. They don't have medical training.

[00:10:00]

Our conferences and learning opportunities are often sponsored by the drug companies. Wings of hospitals in different countries are sponsored by drug companies.

Shawn Buckley

And as far as informed consent, my understanding is that a person has to understand both the risks—

Ann McCormack

Oh, the risks and the benefits, right.

Shawn Buckley

And the benefits. And then the ingredients.

Ann McCormack

Well, yes, the ingredients. I don't know that you need to learn how to spell "thimerosal" or some of the ingredients that are in a drug. But certainly, at the bare minimum, you must be able to—in some informal way in your mind at least—balance the risk-benefit ratio and make a decision for your very own body. Or that of your child. Or that even of your unborn child.

Shawn Buckley

Now you had some conversations with the pharmacist that was at your pharmacy because eventually, your pharmacy did get the COVID-19 vaccines.

Ann McCormack

Yes. I will say I wasn't employed at that pharmacy much after the first vaccine doses came in. But I would ask questions, "Well, what about informed consent?" Because keep in mind, I had let my licence go many years before and came back to work because I wanted to. And there would be questions—I would say, "Well, what about informed consent?" And from educated—to my mind, very good-hearted people—the answer was things like, "Well, that's the way we do things now." And you could knock me over with a feather. When I asked about things like blood clots for instance— Because it was in the popular press, people wanted to know; they were worried and they wanted to know the answer. "Well, what about blood clots? What do you tell them?" "Well, you can treat blood clots."

That was literally the answer: "You can treat them."

Shawn Buckley

What would the pharmacist do if asked about the long-term safety data by a patient?

Ann McCormack

That's another one that was brushed off. It was to the effect of, "Well, that is how we do things now." One of the pharmacists—again, licensed, experienced, you know, upstanding person in the community—would say, "Well, first of all, there are no long-term safety data. But am I worried about it? No." So you're inserting an opinion in that conversation which, to my mind, ought to be strictly the facts.

Your opinion—I don't know, you guys are the lawyers. If you try to influence somebody with your opinion on a health decision, I think you've overstepped the line as a professional.

Shawn Buckley

I appreciate that you weren't licensed at the time so that you did not give any injections. If you had been licensed, how do you think you would have dealt with this?

Ann McCormack

I would have quit. There is absolutely nothing—I can't think of a situation where I would have prepared a patient and given an injection, firstly, that I had concerns about. If I had concerns about something, I would have sought answers to satisfy my curiosity. And I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have done it.

Shawn Buckley

Now, as things went on—and you already told us that you weren't employed there for much longer after—can you explain for us what happened?

Ann McCormack

Yes. In 2012, we lost our toddler son in an accident on our farm. And so, I just felt when I was wearing masks, because they were mandated, I couldn't breathe. I got grief feelings: you know, a bit anxious and like I couldn't breathe. I did try wearing masks at work but I eventually just couldn't. And my doctor actually wrote me an exemption.

So, I tootled along. By then everybody's putting Plexiglass up and putting alcohol on ballpoint pens to keep the germs off everything. You know, all these crazy things.

Anyway, my husband is 60 years old. And about six months before I lost my job, our 14-year-old son took his own life the weekend before school started. So, we have lost two children and there was absolutely no way that I could wear a mask.

[00:15:00]

You know, just the feeling of claustrophobia and whatever. And I say that as if I'm putting a label of mental illness on myself. I don't think that that is, I think that that's a very normal reaction given our circumstances. I suspect that it would be mentally ill not to react to the deaths of your two sons and to be able to wear a mask and all this confining stuff.

Anyway, my husband is 60 years old. One day when I was not wearing a mask at the store, I went to help a customer who was his high school bus driver from 45 years ago. Who said, "Get your mask on," or whatever. And I said, "Well, I can go back here or find somebody else to serve you." Jason Kenney, our premier in Alberta at the time, instituted a "snitch line" so you could phone and report people. And so she used Jason Kenney's snitch line to report me for not wearing a mask.

The health inspector contacted the pharmacy. On April 29, 2021, within 20 minutes—despite coming in early to cover the pharmacy so that my superior could have a private doctor's appointment for 20 minutes and then come back to the drug store—that was the end of my job. I had to go home.

Shawn Buckley

When we were in Winnipeg last week and playing government clips, when they were talking about snitch lines, they used a much more police-state term. They used the term "ambassador," that you would be an ambassador. I think at the NCI we're going to adopt that: "the ambassador." It just kind of has an Orwellian ring to it.

So you lost your job. My understanding is that you filed a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

Ann McCormack

Yes. I did it on my own and then I thought, "This is ridiculous. That's not going to get anywhere." For one thing, if you live in a town the size of ours— I knew who had made the complaint against me and I phoned her and asked her why on earth she did that. She said, "Well, I'm sorry, but—" I mean, I don't even know if she's alive anymore. She's got to be close to 90, or over 90.

And then I thought, well, I am going to fight this. This is wrong on so many levels. This makes no sense. And then I did get a lawyer, withdrew my complaint, and he submitted a complaint to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. And I'd also tried to reason with the College of Pharmacy. I said, "I'm not even a regulated member. Why did I lose my job?" And of course, what they did was put pressure on all pharmacists so that even unregulated cashiers, everybody, would be wearing masks. I don't know what would have happened to my immediate superior if I hadn't worn a mask. So yes, that's been before the Alberta Human Rights Commission. It will be two years in just a few days.

We had a conciliation meeting to try and work things out—which was not successful at all—in which my lawyer had presence of mind to ask before the Zoom meeting started, because the other party was a little bit late joining, if there was a bias against people like me. “People like me.” And this young fellow from the Human Rights Commission who was sort of mediating this negotiation, or was supposed to be, he admitted. He laughed, he said, “Yeah, well, I guess I have to admit that, yes, we do have a bias against you.”

Shawn Buckley

Interesting. Now, my understanding is you filed almost two years ago and the importance of that is: You haven’t had a decision yet, number one. And two, your two-year limitation to start court proceedings is just about to run out.

Ann McCormack

Yes, it is. And my lawyer has written two letters to the Human Rights Commission. I think it’s probably about the same across the country but this is of course to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. One last October 28th, saying, you know, “I’m seeing other cases go by.” He’s got five of us within the province of Alberta who have expert testimony and legal representation. “Why aren’t my cases being looked at? Why are tribunals not looking at my people, my specific people, at the Alberta Human Rights Commission?”

He just wrote another letter just a few days ago, six months later [Exhibit SA-6b].

Shawn Buckley

I think that was April 14th. Your lawyer is James Kitchen?

Ann McCormack

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And he’s coming tomorrow to speak. And we’ll file—in fact, we’ve already filed—those letters that he wrote.

[00:20:00]

Just to substantiate, what you’re saying is that they’ve basically been dragging it out for no reason.

Ann McCormack

Yeah. Well, I think the reason is in fact that it times me out, so that they’ve taken my choice to go through the courts away from me. You can’t do it at the same time. If I failed at the Tribunal then maybe I would go through the court proceeding, which would be more expensive and I don’t know if it would be successful or not.

And it doesn’t matter. To me, the fact is that they’ve taken away my chance to advocate for myself, to make my case. It’s so true that justice delayed truly is justice denied.

Shawn Buckley

Right. I have no further questions for you. I'll ask if the commissioners have any questions.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you for your testimony. I'm just wondering if there was a formal public tendering process for the government choosing which pharmacies would meet the qualifications for giving vaccines to customers.

Ann McCormack

Oh, my! Well, I'm not an expert on that. However, in such an unusual situation to my mind in this country, politicians started naming Shoppers Drug Mart. "Go to Shoppers Drug Mart to get your—" It should be a private business. Why not Guardian Drugs? Why not Apple? And I guess I have seen some coincidences, where Shoppers Drug Mart was bought out by Superstore in about 2013. Owned by Westons. Westons and Trudeaus are pretty good friends. I don't know if that has anything to do with it. I don't know. I haven't read any contracts.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

And also, we heard earlier—I believe from Dr. Christian—that there is an assumption that 13-year-olds are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions to the vax. But presumably the adults dictating that children receive the vax would understand the risks. Did you hear or know of any health professionals that chose not to vax a young person on the basis that that youth might not have the capacity to give consent?

Ann McCormack

I did not witness that, no. However, as a mom of a 14-year-old son who took his own life, I would say that young people probably don't have the greatest judgment. This was absolutely shocking to us. We'd been at home, of course, without school, for months. My son said that this had been the best summer of his life. Okay, the cops are going to get me because we live on a farm and we were not too concerned about all these restrictions. He went boating with his cousins. He could sleep in. You know, he read books, went exploring all over our farm for acres and acres for hours every day, you know, rode his horse, had the dog. I mean, he didn't have to go to school, so he was having a great summer. So, there's an example of a 14-year-old who made a decision that he couldn't undo. And I would suspect that there are lots of teenagers that may make a decision to take a vaccination that you can't undo.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

I'd like to thank you for your testimony and I'm sincerely sorry for your loss. Thank you.

Ann McCormack

Thank you.

Shawn Buckley

And there's still more questions.

Commissioner Drysdale

Thank you for your testimony. Did you witness any of the vaccine injections that were going on in either your drugstore or any other drugstore in your community—like, first-hand witness them?

Ann McCormack

The needle going in the arm? No, I didn't. We have an injection room for privacy for people.

Commissioner Drysdale

Okay. You mentioned that when you questioned the pharmacist about long-term effects, he didn't seem to be concerned with that. Did the pharmacist and then the people around you understand the unique nature of the mRNA vaccines? In other words, this wasn't like a measles vaccine. This was something different. Did they know that?

Ann McCormack

I think so. I think it was in the press. And as I say, I think the political football that it became, like, "We've got to get it! We've got to get it!" Do you remember the competition? It was sort of watching this race to get this vax. There was even different language about it, to get the vaccine out there. Like it was an accelerated pace to get that technology developed, get it into needles, get it into your arm, right? It was a real race.

[00:25:00]

It was a sensationalized thing.

Yeah, so people did know that. As I say, if COVID sprang up in March of 2020— March 17th I think, was sort of the lockdowns in Alberta. School was done for the rest of the year, et cetera. If it was a new disease, surely, surely people must know that if the vaccine was a new technology and only around for six months; there could not possibly be any long-term safety data on it. And if you had that question and you asked it, surely it should have been answered honestly, that we just don't know.

Commissioner Drysdale

I just want to confirm what I thought I heard you say. Did you say that normally the pharmacy would get paid about \$13 per dose for an ordinary vaccine, but that they were paid \$25 a dose for the COVID-19 vaccine—that's almost double?

Ann McCormack

That's correct and that's Alberta. A pharmacist, like maybe Krista Moe— I believe Premier Scott Moe's wife is a pharmacist and they own a drugstore about an hour and a half from Saskatoon, licensed in Saskatchewan, could give you a better answer about Saskatchewan information.

Commissioner Drysdale

Well, Alberta's information is fine. I just want to make sure I understand this. Does that include the cost of the vaccine? In other words—

Ann McCormack

Oh, oh, oh. I'm sorry to interrupt you. Yes, that's a very good question. Sorry. And I believe the other commissioner was maybe trying to get at that.

The expenses around delivering the vaccine for the individual drugstores in Alberta would be the storage requirements in a fridge and whatever personal protective equipment you had to wear—gloves, a mask, whatever. So, I won't say that the vaccines were provided to the drugstores free, because they were provided from the federal government bought with tax dollars, right? So of course, they're not free. But the individual drugstores did not buy them themselves. They had to go to the expense of purchasing gloves and masks but they didn't buy the vaccines.

Commissioner Drysdale

I understand. So, the increased cost may have been somewhat related to them having to buy PPE that they didn't necessarily need to use for, like, a TWINRIX vax.

Ann McCormack

Well, maybe. I think most pharmacists would likely use gloves anyways. Maybe not a mask in the before-times, I guess you'd say, or before COVID. They may or may not wear a mask in close contact with people. I think it was for the extra counselling, maybe, that it took for mRNA injections, to talk to people about them. Probably took more time with this new technology.

Commissioner Drysdale

Extra counselling?

Ann McCormack

Well, pharmacists are required to counsel and make sure there is informed consent and answer questions around it.

In Alberta, I believe the pharmacists were also encouraged to consult their patient lists—so the database that you'd have per patient, which is confidential. And to my mind, that was not breached; I'm not saying that at all. But they were encouraged to contact people that would normally come to their drugstore and make appointments to give the mRNA injections. I don't think that's ever happened—not to my knowledge—in any other situation before.

Commissioner Drysdale

Lust so I'm clear, the pharmacists were cold-calling potential clients and they were using their patient list to do that?

Ann McCormack

Yes. And I believe they were encouraged to do that by the Alberta government.

Commissioner Drysdale

Hmm. Thank you very much.

Shawn Buckley

There being no further questions, Ann, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we sincerely thank you for coming and testifying today.

Ann McCormack

Thank you all. Thank you.

[00:29:20]



Final Review and Approval: Jodi Bruhn, August 21, 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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