



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Saskatoon, SK

Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 12: Heather Burgess

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Our next witness is Heather Burgess. Heather, I'll start by asking you to state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name.

Heather Burgess

Heather Barbara Burgess, H-E-A-T-H-E-R—

Shawn Buckley

And Heather— Oh, I'm sorry.

Heather Burgess

Sorry, B-U-R-G-E-S-S.

Shawn Buckley

Heather, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Heather Burgess

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you're a retired nurse.

Heather Burgess

Yes, I am.

Shawn Buckley

You had spent your whole career caring for others.

Heather Burgess

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And as I understand it, you had five siblings.

Heather Burgess

I have five siblings, yes, one's passed.

Shawn Buckley

Can you tell us basically, as the pandemic is starting— So we're near the end of February 2020. Can you tell us about your father and mother and what started to transpire there?

Heather Burgess

Certainly. My mom and dad resided in Saskatoon all of their lives. They were living in assisted living. My dad was almost 93; Mom was almost 88. I live in B.C., and I went back to visit Mom and Dad, and I noticed that my dad was not well. So I stayed in Saskatoon, and we found out that he had terminal cancer. And my mom had vascular and Alzheimer's dementia, a mix of both. But my dad cued her and gave her enough assistance so they could live in assisted living together. They were married for 67 years. My dad was her rock.

And when Dad was diagnosed, I knew that we would need to find a place for my mom, that she would need more care. So while I was caring for Dad while he was dying, I did find a place in Saskatoon for Mom. This was happening all through the month of February, that my dad was dying. At that time, there was no mention of COVID. We didn't know what was going to happen. And the home that we found for my mom, it was agreed that we would be able to help settle Mom in gradually after Dad passed away. We could spend lots of time with Mom. We took their bedroom suite that they slept in for many years to make it more comfortable for Mom. We had a plan.

And when Dad passed and he was passing—

Shawn Buckley

You can take your time.

Heather Burgess

The one concern that he had was, what was going to happen to Mom? I assured him that I would care for her and that everything was going to be all right. Dad passed on February 28th. All his wishes were granted. He wanted to be in his own bed, all of his children around him, my mom with him. And we buried my dad on the 15th of March.

On the 16th, the lockdowns happened in Saskatoon. My sister, who was from Winnipeg, after Dad's funeral, agreed to stay with Mom in assisted living until we moved her over to

the assisted-care home in the end of March. I went back to B.C.; I was pretty exhausted. It was an exhausting time. My sister stayed with Mom. And they were literally locked down in the building, in the assisted-living building. There were activities for the first two weeks, but after the two weeks all activities for the residents ceased, and they were basically only allowed out of their rooms to go down to the dining room for meals. Now, Mom and Dad were on the sixth floor and there's only two elevators that go up and down. They split the dining room up in the times— They put more eating hour times in and they would only have two residents to a table instead of four. Basically, that was the only time that they were out of their room.

So they were locked down until we moved mom over to her new home.

Shawn Buckley

And how long did that go on for?

[00:05:00]

Heather Burgess

That was for the whole month that mom was in assisted living with my sister. Like, they couldn't leave. They could not leave the building and nobody could come and visit.

Shawn Buckley

So for an entire month your mother and sister are locked in the same room and they're only allowed out to go for meals.

Heather Burgess

Yes. Sorry, I'll retract that. March 15th was the lockdown, so the two weeks before mom went into the personal care home, yes, they were locked down.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. What happens then? So the end of March, you've told us that you had arranged for her to go to this private care home. And the private care home had said, "Yes, you can have a family member move in with your mother to help her with this transition."

Heather Burgess

Yes. But then, of course, the middle of March, the lockdowns were just to be for two weeks. So we assumed the end of March, that would be fine, and we could move mom over. So my sister was there to make the transition with her, and basically nobody was permitted to be with my mom.

So she was confused. She'd just lost her soul mate of 67 years and there were just new faces where she was going. The surroundings were unfamiliar. And she was trying to go through a grieving process, confused, and she wasn't allowed—

Shawn Buckley

I'll just stop you. So this is two weeks after her husband of 67 years has died?

Heather Burgess

Yeah, this was four weeks actually. She was in the other home for a month after dad passed.

Shawn Buckley

Right, but obviously, she's grieving.

Heather Burgess

She's grieving because she has dementia and she can't remember that dad passed.

Shawn Buckley

Okay.

Heather Burgess

And now she's in brand-new surroundings, very confused. She thought she was kidnapped. She would have the nurses or the care aides phone us. And she would phone and she'd say that she'd been kidnapped, and did we know when Dad would come home from work to pick her up?

Shawn Buckley

Now, what was her emotional state when she would phone and say she was kidnapped?

Heather Burgess

She was crying and anxious. Yeah.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so your mother, who has dementia, she didn't understand what was going on.

Heather Burgess

No.

Shawn Buckley

So she literally believed she was being kidnapped and she's crying on the phone.

Heather Burgess

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And she's obviously begging for help.

Heather Burgess

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. And you guys— They wouldn't let you in even under those circumstances?

Heather Burgess

No. My one sister that lives in Saskatoon was allowed to take her for two days while the doctors medicated her to get her on to a medication that would help with her anxiety.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. What did your mother do while she was there? So she's locked down, but she started taking some action into her own hands, didn't she?

Heather Burgess

Yeah. So once we got her on the anxiety medication, she was better. But as with a lot of dementia patients that suffer from sundowners, the evening time is the worst time. So my nephew set up a little iPhone port for her that the nurses could phone us and she could see us and we could see Mom. We arranged a schedule that I would talk to her in the morning, and I would read to her. I had an old novel of hers that she loved and that gave her great comfort. I could see her and she could see me reading to her. And then in the evening, when it was most difficult for her, my sister in Winnipeg would set up her iPhone by the piano and she would play piano for mom and settle her that way.

Shawn Buckley

Did your mother ever try to leave?

Heather Burgess

Yes, she did. She was a Houdini. She tried to run away three different times. The care home manager would follow her when they saw she got out the door, just to see how far she would go and what her intentions were. And then she would bring her back. The third time, she actually even took a chair from the dining room, down eight steps to the door, because they'd raised the lock higher. And she put the chair down there so she could stand on the chair and try to undo the lock to get out.

Shawn Buckley

So your mother, who believed she was being kidnapped, tried to escape several times.

Heather Burgess

Yes, she did.

Shawn Buckley

Now when July 11th 2020 came around, the government would allow one visitor and only outside visits on the property. Am I right about that?

Heather Burgess

Yes, that's correct.

[00:10:00]

Shawn Buckley

So for the first time in five months your mother could get a hug from a family member.

Heather Burgess

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

But did that help you at all?

Heather Burgess

It could not be me. I tried to get there for a visit, but that particular home had— Their ruling was that anybody out-of-province was not allowed to come in to see Mom, even with a PCR test.

Shawn Buckley

So even if you had a test showing that you didn't have COVID, you were not allowed to see your mother.

Heather Burgess

No, I wasn't.

Shawn Buckley

What happened to your mother in April of 2020?

Heather Burgess

August?

Shawn Buckley

Oh, I'm sorry, August. Thank you.

Heather Burgess

Yes. So August of 2020, Mom fell in the home and she broke her hip. She was admitted to hospital here in Saskatoon and, after her surgery, transferred over to another hospital. I won't name names of hospitals. At that time, as much as it was a terrible thing, it was also a blessing because then she could have two visitors to see her for two hours a day within the hospital setting.

So we only have one of my siblings that live in Saskatoon. And because she had been up to see mom, I found out from her what the procedure was and that they never asked for I.D. Because I thought, "Come hell or high water, I'm getting in to see my mom." So they didn't ask for vaccine; they weren't doing the vaccinating then. They didn't ask for any I.D. So I have, luckily, two sisters with unisex names—a Terry and a Kim. So my brothers became

Terry or Kim. I became a Terry. We each took a week off that we came back to Saskatoon. And every day we went into that hospital and we saw Mom. And we didn't stay for two hours, we would stay for eight hours a day. None of the nursing staff said a word to us because they knew we were a help to them. Because Mom was a handful and she's very confused. Now she's even in a newer environment.

Shawn Buckley

Right, right. So that worked out well. But then your mother fell again and broke her pelvis.

Heather Burgess

Yes, then she fell in September and broke her pelvis. And I knew, being a nurse, that this was going to be the end, and summoned all my brothers and sisters that we should all be there. So the first day at the hospital, when I arrived and my sister was there and my brother, Mom was in a semi-private room. We were allowed to be in there; nobody said anything that the three of us were in there. Then the next day, my sister and I had requested an appointment with the palliative care doctor that we just wanted my mom to be comfortable. We knew that this was the end for her. And we arranged then the medication change. And we knew that probably by midnight that night, she would not be with us any longer.

So that evening, about five o'clock in the afternoon actually, a nurse walked into the room. I'm thinking it's probably the evening supervisor doing—it was a male nurse—his rounds. He came into the room and saw the three of us there. We're still waiting for another brother to get here. He said, "By the time I come walking down this hall into this room again, I only want to see one of you there."

So we were denied the beautiful death we had with my father to have with my mother.

Shawn Buckley

Just so that I understand. So this is a palliative care bed.

Heather Burgess

This is in the geriatric ward at this hospital. It wasn't palliative care; it was just on a geriatric ward.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. But everyone knows your mother's going to die that day.

Heather Burgess

Absolutely.

Shawn Buckley

So basically, that nurse is making a decision to deny three of you, and your mother, the opportunity for all of you to be together as she passes.

Heather Burgess

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And so what happened?

Heather Burgess

Mom passed on at about 1:30 in the morning the next day. My one brother was with her and he phoned. And we all went up to the hospital, 1:30 in the morning. We were told how to buzz the security fellow. He come, let us right in, didn't ask us any questions. We went right up into the ward and we walked into mom's room. And we got to say goodbye then.

[00:15:00]

Shawn Buckley

So you couldn't be there while she was dying.

Heather Burgess

No.

Shawn Buckley

But no problem at all coming in after she dies.

Heather Burgess

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

How did that make you feel?

Heather Burgess

Angry. Sad. My mom shouldn't have been denied that.

Shawn Buckley

Now, I just want to ask you personally: Going through the COVID experience with the lockdowns and masking and all of that, just how did you experience that personally?

Heather Burgess

Well, I'm unvaccinated. From the very beginning of COVID, when everything started, I was just leery. Just the red flags were popping up. What I knew about your immune system, you would never vaccinate during a pandemic. And I was met with a lot of pushback on Facebook and social media. So I kind of took a step back a little bit for a time being.

And then, when they started vaccinating children and pushing that—I never thought it would come to that. I’m a pediatric nurse. That’s where I spent most of my years. And never once in all my pediatric years did I ever come across a child with a diagnosis of myocarditis. And for them to minimize it and say “a mild case of myocarditis”— There’s no mild cases of myocarditis.

So then I got very vocal on Facebook. And I thought, I know a lot of people. They see it, I know they’re still following my other posts. But I just thought, “If I can stop this needle going into one child’s arm, it will be worth all the criticizing that you’re doing of me.”

I mean, I’d already been called a racist and misogynist from the leader of this country, that I was not fit to be part of society. My husband and I weren’t allowed to go into restaurants, gyms. My husband was not allowed to play on his Oldtimers hockey team; he was segregated from everybody. We were members of a golf course and golf club and we weren’t allowed after September 14th of 2021 to even be on the premises of that golf course.

It was a hurt locker. It was a tough time. There are friends that just didn’t want to have anything to do with us. In fact, one of my friends told me that their children didn’t want them “chumming with us” because we were unvaccinated. It was tough. It was tough with my own children because I have three children with spouses. There’s six of them. There’s only one of those six that isn’t vaccinated. Three were coerced, two went willingly. But when I tried to talk to some of my kids about this— I’m a medical person and they didn’t listen. And now I’m the one that has to worry the rest of my life about how this has affected their lives and how it will affect their health going forward. Because I truly believe that we’re only just seeing the tip of that iceberg about what’s going on underneath there and how this is going to affect so many people.

Yeah, it was hard when your kids won’t listen to you. Just take a step back and just take your time with this.

Shawn Buckley

Now, do you have any suggestions on how governments could have done this differently?

Heather Burgess

How this country could have done this better? Sorry.

Shawn Buckley

Yeah. Because basically the purpose of the Inquiry is trying to figure out how we could do things better. And I’m just wondering what your thoughts on that are.

Heather Burgess

I am appalled and shocked at the medical community that have sat back and been silent. And nurses that have been silent. They’re seeing what’s coming into emergency now. And I understand people are afraid for their jobs, their securities, they’ve got mortgages to pay. But it just takes that one person to speak up and start the ball rolling. All these experts that spoke up—like Dr. Bridle, Dr. Hoffe, the study he had going—all these people have been crucified. They’ve lost their jobs, their credibility.

This has to change. I think it has to start changing with the College of Family Physicians and Surgeons.

[00:20:00]

It has to start changing at a government level, higher up. It was just such a great psyop. It was just a great story that they told everybody, and everybody believed it.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you. I have no further questions. I'll see if the commissioners have questions for you. And there are no questions.

So on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we sincerely thank you for sharing with us today.

Heather Burgess

And I'd like to thank all of you, the panel, and all of the work that all of you have put into this because it needs to be heard.

[00:21:04]

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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