

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF MS LILIANA RATCLIFF**

1. This statement is about my experience in Victoria's COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program.
2. I entered quarantine at the Stamford Plaza Hotel on 6 May 2020 and left the hotel on 20 May 2020.
3. I graduated from Lincoln School of Health Sciences (LaTrobe) in 1997 and have held registration as a physiotherapist with AHPRA continuously. I have been employed as a physiotherapist in hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, community health and other settings for over 20 years.
4. I hold a Master of Public Health and have worked on various public health projects, including as Coordinator of advanced scope clinics at Peninsula Health, Team Leader at Western Region Health Centre overseeing several projects and staff, project for World Vision and a research project for CBM International.
5. I understand what is needed for infection control and I am familiar with the infection control procedures used in hospitals.

**Background**

6. I previously lived in the city of Seville (in Spain) with my family for five years. While I was in Spain, I was a humanitarian worker.
7. In December 2019, I returned to Seville. My husband joined us briefly and returned to Australia with our two older children, whilst I remained in Spain with my children (aged 13 and 9). The reason for the trip was to sell a house that we owned and to take care of some paperwork.
8. While we were in Spain, the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding.
9. I booked a flight home for myself and children via London and Doha and we arrived in Melbourne at around 8.15pm on 6 May 2020.



10. We and others travelling on the plane were very careful. My children and I wore masks on all the flights. Passengers had to sit close together during take-off and landing, but we practised social distancing whenever we could.

#### **At the airport**

11. There were about 30 or 40 travellers with us when we arrived at Melbourne airport. We were met by about twice that number of police and staff from the Department of Health and Human Services (the **Department**) and the atmosphere was very formal.
12. Travellers who did not have masks were provided with them as we got off the plane, and we were asked to collect our bags quickly. We picked up our luggage at about 8.45pm.
13. We were given Detention Notices. A copy of my Detention Notice (with my personal details redacted) is **Annexure A** to this statement. We were also given some chocolates.
14. We walked through the duty-free area and went through Immigration and customs. After that, we were diverted out of the public part of the terminal and ushered to the back of the airport where buses were waiting. By then, it was almost 9pm.
15. It seemed like the overriding concern was detaining us. We were corralled onto buses. Our bus was too full for everyone to socially distance.
16. A police officer got on the bus to tell my son to stop eating the chocolates we had been given as we could not remove our masks at any time. There were no other specific instructions on the bus, but passengers took it upon themselves to try to keep as much distance from each other as we could.
17. We sat on the bus for about 15 minutes and then we were driven to the Stamford Plaza Hotel.

**Arrival at the Hotel**

18. We arrived at the hotel at around 11pm. Police had stopped the traffic on Exhibition street for the bus to turn onto Little Collins Street, which shocked me.
19. We were corralled into the foyer. There were a lot of people and it was too full for everyone to socially distance, even though we tried. I was given priority and did not have to wait for as long because I had children.
20. We were told where to stand and queue. There were people everywhere doing different jobs.
21. I completed paperwork at one table and was given many pages of information. A copy of that information is **Annexure B** to this statement.
22. Because I have an auto-immune condition, I was told to see a nurse who was sitting behind a different table in the lobby. The nurses were not readily distinguishable from the other staff. It was a very tense situation and we were being given instructions the whole time.
23. There was another area where ladies were giving out food, and we were handed a paper bag with sandwiches inside.
24. I was told to provide my credit card details at reception. I remember that they gave me a new pen to sign with – a pen that nobody else had used.
25. After that, we were escorted to our rooms. A security guard got into the lift with us and pushed the buttons. I held my children next to me and stood at the back of the lift, as far away from the guard as I could.
26. Another man tried to come into the lift with some of our luggage, but the first guard held his hand up and told him to take a different elevator.
27. Some of our bags had already been taken up to our rooms. I believe that the men helping with our bags were security guards.

28. We arrived in our rooms at around 11.30pm. We had two adjoining rooms, on the second or third floor of the hotel. The corridor was in a "U" shape. From outside our doorway, I could see down into the lobby.
29. That night was very stressful for me.

### **During Quarantine**

30. On our first day in quarantine we slept a lot.
31. Every day in quarantine we were called by a nurse, usually at around 10am or 11am. The nurse asked if we had a fever, a cough, a sore throat or other symptoms of COVID-19.
32. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were delivered to us each day in plastic bags. We got a knock on the door to let us know that food had been delivered. The food was left outside our door, and I would open the door to collect it. Once I saw a person when I opened the door for food, but they quickly ran away.
33. We were given the same breakfast each day. The other meals were mostly curries and pies. Once, we were given a salad, but otherwise there were very few vegetables only mushroom or pumpkin soup. A photo of some of the food that we were given in quarantine is **Annexure C** to my statement, including the one salad.
34. It was possible to order Uber Eats. I started ordering food for me and my kids, because it was a way that we could have some control over a small part of our lives while we were in quarantine. From a mental health perspective, it was good for us to have that autonomy - to eat when we were hungry and to choose what we wanted to have.
35. When food from Uber Eats was delivered, it was usually left in the lobby for about 10minutes. The people who delivered the food were not allowed inside the hotel and there was a short delay before it was taken up to the room. I know this because I got a message from the Uber Eats driver who would send a photo of the food on a table where I could see other people's orders, and because I could see the lobby from our floor.

36. Other deliveries were allowed, and my husband and friends sent packages to us.
37. Every few days I would get a knock on the door to let me know that a paper notice had been delivered. Notices were left on the floor just outside the door and I did not see who left them. The notices contained information about things like COVID-19 testing and changes to rules. A copy of the notices I received is **Annexure D** to my statement.

### **COVID-19 testing**

38. Nurses tested us for COVID-19 on our third day in Quarantine. I was expecting them and had been told roughly what time they were coming.
39. I noticed that the nurses were using the same cart to transport equipment and medical supplies between rooms.
40. The nurses did not change their gloves, masks or gowns in between testing me and my two children. I also did not see them change their personal protective equipment before or after testing us. I assume that they went on to test other people at the hotel wearing the same masks, gloves and gowns.
41. As a health professional, my expectation was that they would change their personal protective equipment for each patient, or at least in between hotel rooms. In a hospital, we keep personal protective equipment outside the patient's room with signs detailing the infection risk, and are specifically instructed that anything we take from room to room must be disinfected.
42. There were three nurses and they did not come into our room. They suggested that I put a chair in the doorway. We sat in the chair and tilted our heads back for the test.
43. I did not see them use a disposal bin. The nurses' trolley was so close to me that I could have touched it.
44. While we were being tested, a person came to speak with the nurses. He stood quite close to them as the hallway was quite narrow. The nurses spoke

with him politely and answered him, but I was concerned that they did not warn him to keep a distance.

45. Only one nurse ever came into our room and that was to take a blood sample from me on day 2 of our time in quarantine. That nurse was from Melbourne Pathology and was wearing a face mask, gloves and a long disposable gown.

#### **Fresh-air breaks and exercise**

46. I was told that, because I had children, we could have more walks outside than other people in quarantine.
47. We had a fresh air break on about 10th May 2020, which was our fourth day in quarantine. I remember that it was the day after we were tested for COVID-19 but before we'd received our results.
48. A security guard knocked on our door and offered to take us out on a walk. I had not been told that he was coming at that time so we were not wearing shoes. He said something like *"I've only got 10 minutes for a walk and a lot of people to walk."* Because we were not ready, he returned 20 minutes later to collect us.
49. The security guard got into the elevator with us and pushed the buttons. Again, I huddled at the back of the lift with my children, to keep as much distance as possible. Another guard tried to get into the same lift, but the first guard told him to use another elevator.
50. The guard who collected us seemed to be a leader. He was wearing an N95 mask and gloves. The other guards did not have N95 masks and did not always wear gloves.
51. We were taken to an alleyway next to the hotel which was 20 to 40 metres long. We walked up and down, on the cement, for about ten minutes. This area was usually open to the public, but it was closed off when we had our walk.

52. Four guards supervised us while we were outside. The lead guard gave directions to the others. He told them to stand at each end of the alleyway. It seemed like the guards knew each other - they would be close together and talk. My impression was that the lead guard was trying to maintain order.
53. I was in survival mode at the time and I was really worried about infection. On the walk, I saw some people who were not wearing masks and I saw a lot of people in the hotel foyer.
54. On my return from the walk, I noticed that outside one of the hotel rooms was a bag of food that had not been collected. I wondered how long it would be there before someone would notice that it had not been collected, and why no one had noticed.
55. My kids and I only had one walk while in quarantine, despite being offered more fresh air breaks. After the first walk I did not want to go outside again, as I did not feel that safe practices were being observed and the children felt it made them stressed, being watched by four strange men. I detailed these concerns to the person who called asking if we wanted another walk.

#### **Concerns about infection control**

56. Because of the guards' behaviour when we were taken for our walk, and because of what I observed about how the nurses conducted our COVID-19 test, I was concerned that infection control and prevention at the hotel was not up to standard.
57. My children and I did not have COVID-19 and I became very concerned that we might catch the virus from the staff moving between the rooms. I was especially anxious about getting the virus because I have an auto-immune disease, and I was worried by the thought of being detained further if we tested positive.
58. Because of my concerns about infection control and other health risks, I began to refuse to answer the routine questions from the nurses during their daily calls. I did that to try to get them to escalate my concerns.

59. The nurses would ask me to *"please just answer the questions"*, but I refused. I raised a new issue of concern with them every day.
60. I expressed my concerns for elderly and disabled people in quarantine and asked who was checking on them. I also asked about people with existing medical conditions. The nurses told me that they would conduct blood tests if required. I said that it was not good enough to wait for people to raise health issues and that it was important for nurses to check on people face-to-face, so that they could observe their condition and make sure their needs were met.
61. I was worried that the physical set-up of the hotel rooms was not right. For example, the shower was over a bath, which created a risk of falls.
62. I also raised concerns for the mental health of other quarantined guests. I had heard that there had been a suicide in quarantine and I explained that it was not enough to call people only once each day. People at risk would go unnoticed. I told them that, if I was going to commit suicide, I would do it just after their daily call, because I would know that no-one would check on me for another 24 hours.
63. I was worried about people travelling alone. I explained to the nurses that the experience of being in quarantine was mentally challenging.
64. After a few days of me refusing to answer questions from the nurses about whether I had any symptoms of COVID-19, the Nursing Manager called me. He was annoyed and wanted me to just answer the questions. He said words to the effect that I was *"making things difficult"*.
65. I continued to refuse to answer the questions and explained to him that I was doing this to try to get their attention to communicate my concerns. He then said that he would send me an email telling me how to make a complaint to the Department, which I did on 18 May 2020. My complaint is **Annexure E** to this statement.
66. I believe that the nurses understood infection control and that they protected themselves.



67. The nurses gave my children games to play and toys, which I believe was in response to me not taking them on walks. I appreciated this, and I felt that they were trying to address some of our needs.

### **Guards**

68. I would see the guards when I opened the door, which was three or four times each day. I could also see the guards through a peephole in my door, but I did not spend time watching what they were doing.
69. There were usually two security guards on the hotel floor. One of the guards was a woman. Another guard was often around her and I could see that they knew each other, as they would be quite physically close when they talked to each other. One guard would sit down and the other would stand.
70. Some guards were more attentive than others. One time, a guard was wearing earphones and did not react at all when I opened the door.
71. I noticed that the guards did not practice social distancing and would sometimes lean against the hotel railings. The guards wore masks but did not always wear gloves. I could tell from a distance that some guards were not wearing gloves because I could see them tapping on their phones.
72. As a health professional, knowing that there was a risk of infection at the hotel, I had a sense of panic when I observed the guards not wearing gloves or leaning on surfaces. I knew that what they were doing was not safe.

### **Hotel Staff**

73. On Mother's Day someone knocked on our door. A gift of jam, lollies and chocolates was waiting on the floor outside the room in a bag that had "Stamford" written on it.
74. Not long after receiving this gift I had another knock at the door. I opened it and there was a man standing there. He was not wearing a mask and I was not wearing a mask either. He said, "*you're a mother, aren't you?*" and gave

me two more bags of gifts. I think he was a member of the hotel staff, but I am not sure.

75. While I appreciated the kindness of these gestures, I was worried that he was not wearing a mask.
76. I saw hotel staff when we first arrived, and I saw them when they collected the rubbish (which we had to leave in bags outside our door). From what I saw, the hotel staff did not wear gowns, but they did wear gloves. I do not remember if they all wore masks.

### Leaving Quarantine

77. On my second-last day in quarantine, I received a phone call from the Department. They told me that we would be allowed to leave early on the day of departure because we were a family, and that they would send me paperwork that night. They gave me two options of time to leave.
78. Two official-looking men in suits knocked on my door and gave me an End of Detention Notice. They stood well back from the door while they spoke to me. I think they were wearing identification. A copy of my End of Detention Notice (with my personal details redacted) is **Annexure F** to this statement.
79. On the day we were to leave, we were told to wait in our room with the door closed. A man knocked on the door and took our bags and we got into the lift with him. We waited for him to push the buttons.
80. I did not see any other hotel guests in the lobby that day and it was much more organised than when we had arrived.
81. I had to sign forms given to me by staff from the Department or the hotel (I am not sure which). They tried to hand me the same pen that they were using so that I could sign documents with it. I used my own pen instead.
82. We were also asked to sign by leaning on the table they were sitting at, which meant getting closer than 1.5m to them.

83. I made one more complaint about the health risks I had identified. The ladies who spoke with me were pleasant and they told us to have a nice day. Some police officers were there.
84. We were then escorted to a taxi. We wore masks when we left the hotel.
85. We were never given masks, gloves or sanitizer in the hotel, including when we went for walks. I had brought my own supplies which is what my kids and I used.

### **General Observations**

86. My main concern in hotel quarantine was not the nurses or the guards or the hotel staff. The people were lovely and made the effort to keep us as comfortable as possible in the circumstances.
87. My main concern was the actual set-up of the quarantine program. I believe it was not being run correctly and that many of the people involved were not trained in infection control. The approach was so different to what I was used to from working in hospitals.
88. When I expressed my concerns about this, I felt that I was brushed off. I believe there should have been proper processes for escalating concerns and complaints.
89. I received an automated reply from the Department's 'Feedback Management System' on 18 May 2020 in response to the complaint that I made while I was in quarantine but have still not received a proper reply.
90. I contacted the Inquiry because I believe that it is important that things are done correctly in the future. In a hospital, when something bad happens, we talk about what went wrong. That's how things change.
91. In quarantine, I was tearing my hair out, knowing that the infection control processes were not right, but not knowing how to protect people. Even though I was a recipient and not a health professional there, I felt that I had a duty of care.

Signature Liliana Ratcliff

Print name LILIANA RATCLIFF

Date 18<sup>th</sup> AUGUST, 2020