

WITNESS STATEMENT OF**MR CRAIG ARUNDEL**

- 1 This statement is about my personal experience working as a security guard in Victoria's COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program (**Quarantine**).
- 2 I completed approximately six and a half weeks of work at two Quarantine Hotels through a security company called the Nexar Group (**Nexar**). I was engaged as a Security Guard with Nexar on 31 March 2020 and completed other security work with them (such as at ALDI stores) prior to my engagement at the Quarantine hotels.
- 3 My background is as an Emergency Services Officer (**ESO**). I have previously worked at the Hazelwood mine site, working on rescue systems, occupational health and safety, and firefighting. I hold a PUA30613 Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations). I have also previously worked in hospitality, for event companies, and have a military background, having served in the Navy.

Engagement at the Quarantine Hotels

- 4 During my engagement at the Quarantine hotels, I completed two "rounds" of work at the Pullman Melbourne on Swanston (**Pullman**), between 28 May to 5 June 2020 (Round 1) and between 15 June to 22 June 2020 (Round 2).
- 5 I was then engaged as the Site Security Manager for Nexar at a "COVID Hotel" between 23 June and 13 July 2020. My engagement at the hotels ended on 13 July 2020 when Corrections Victoria took over the Quarantine operations at the COVID Hotel that I was working at.
- 6 The Pullman and the COVID Hotel both operated differently. The Pullman was a Quarantine hotel for returned travellers, meaning that there might be a mix of COVID-positive and COVID-negative people. The COVID-hotel only accommodated COVID-positive patients.

My experience at the Pullman Hotel

- 7 From 28 May 2020, I was responsible for setting up the administrative support for the Nexar Guards at the Pullman. I was the key point of contact for all Nexar guards and advised on administrative matters including pay queries, advising where to park, advising on the structure of how the hotel was run and the chain of command, and provided a personalised on-boarding experience for new guards. I also provided feedback to Nexar on the guards' performance.
- 8 One of my other jobs included taking guests up to their rooms when they checked into the hotel. In that 3-minute lift ride, I tried to talk to people and really bring a human element to their hotel quarantine experience. There were families with little kids who has just gotten off a 40-hour flight and they were exhausted. I would have a quick chat with them, ask them where they had come from, and tell the kids "You are going to love this room guys!" There was one older man who simply thanked me for talking to him as a person.
- 9 The Pullman site was run by Wilson Security (**Wilson**). As I recall, there were approximately four security subcontractors at the Pullman, Nexar being one of them. Nexar guards were paid directly by Nexar.
- 10 There were two 12-hour shifts per day. There were about 30-35 security guards stationed at the Pullman per each 12-hour shift – 2 guards per floor (totalling 24 guards) plus "relievers". Relievers were guards who would rotate between floors to enable guards who were stationed at each floor to take their 30-minute break every four hours, and to take unscheduled toilet breaks. In order to take an unscheduled break, the floor-guard would call the reliever's phone and they were required to wait until the reliever arrived at the floor before they could leave their station. Nexar provided approximately 10 guards per shift.
- 11 An average 12-hour "day" shift would start at 6:00am and finish at 6:00pm. We were asked to arrive 30 minutes before the start of the shift, at 5:30am, to complete the sign-in process. Once we had completed the sign-in process we would attend a "toolbox" meeting.
- 12 For the toolbox meeting, all guards on the incoming shift gathered in the foyer of the hotel. It covered important procedures and updates relevant for the upcoming shift, including:
- (a) A PPE briefing;
 - (b) procedural updates on how we could move around the hotel (for example, we were advised which two of the three elevators would be designated for security guards, and which one was for hotel staff);

- (c) procedures for complaints and any unruly behaviour (including an explanation of the chain of command for escalations); and
- (d) the contact numbers for the supervisors and relievers. Every guard was required to save these numbers to their phones before moving up to their floors.

- 13 We were expected to be on our designated floors and relieving the night-shift staff by 6:00am.
- 14 The shifts at the Pullman were pretty straightforward. We were told not to wear headphones, as we needed to be hypervigilant to any noises, but we were able to use our phones or read a book. Guards were provided the contact numbers for DHHS and we were able to provide these to the guests, if they requested it.
- 15 Generally, there were different levels of competency between the guards and it was important that people were designated to certain floors based on their competency. For example, a less competent guard might be located to a floor where there were no COVID-positive patients. On floors where there were difficult guests, you would allocate a guard with a stronger personality.
- 16 After I had completed a couple of shifts, they asked me to be a reliever. I would move between floors and relieve guards so that they could have their 30-minute break. I would usually have a quick chat with them and during these brief chats I would keep them in the loop on any developments, including advising them if a person had been diagnosed as positive within the hotel.
- 17 The Pullman were great in that they also fed the guards well.

Chain of Command

- 18 The Nexar security guards were required to follow all directions provided by the Wilson supervisors. Wilson supervisors were responsible for such tasks as allocating guards to each floor; training new guards in the correct usage of personal protective equipment (**PPE**); and were the first point-of-contact for any escalations from the guards. I found the Wilson supervisors to be very good. They expected a high standard of the guards and were prepared to send people home if they were not following instructions correctly, or not paying attention during the toolbox meetings. The sentiment was “if you don’t get this right, you’re not on shift tomorrow”.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and training

- 19 Nexar did not provide PPE training for guards at the Pullman, this was done by Wilson. During the sign in process, the Wilson supervisors would identify guards who had not been on-site or worked at a Quarantine hotel before and these guards were provided with a very good PPE briefing. Some guards had never worn PPE before, so it was a steep learning curve for them.
- 20 I completed an Australian Government COVID course which wasn't required to start the shift and wasn't part of the induction. I found it on Facebook through a friend who had completed it and I found it useful, so I provided it to the Nexar guards. A link to this course is available at: <https://covid-19training.gov.au/login>.
- 21 In terms of infection control, we were required to put on our masks when we were walking through the lobby and when a guest was entering or leaving our floor. There was no need to wear our masks when no guests were present. We were also advised to wear gloves. Every floor had a big yellow skip for infectious waste. We were required to dispose of all masks in these skips and sanitise our hands prior to entering the lifts.
- 22 I did not experience any issues with access to PPE. There was ample PPE available.

Social distancing

- 23 The toolbox meetings were held in the foyer of the hotel, which allowed for social distancing, but only just. It was tight. There were also other people using the foyer at the same time, like chefs walking through with food. There were other places which might have been better, for example there was an empty restaurant not being used.
- 24 We were always told to keep our distance from one another, but during the shift changeovers, there were up to 80 guards transitioning through the lobby at the same time, which was difficult. Additionally, guards who have just come off a 12-hour shift might also want to have a quick chat with their mates, but that just couldn't happen. These people were on \$22 an hour and were treated like cattle.

Testing regime

- 25 Nurses offered a COVID-test to guests within 3 days of arrival, and then again at day-11.

Fresh-air breaks

- 26 Co-ordinated, 30-minute fresh-air breaks were provided to guests every 3-4 days, as there were no windows in the rooms. Two guards needed to accompany guests on these breaks. There were four “fresh-air” guards rostered on at each shift.
- 27 Not having windows was particularly hard on people who smoked. There was one guest who usually smoked 30 cigarettes a day, so he disconnected his smoke detector, in order to smoke in his room. The hotel quickly identified the fault, and the smoke detector was reinstated.

Mental Health issues

- 28 There weren't really any mental health incidents which stood out to me.
- 29 If a person raised a mental health issue, then we would forward this straight to DHHS. There were very clear protocols for this. The guard was not responsible for resolving the issue. I know that the COVID Hotel had 24-hour mental health support nurses, but I can't recall whether the mental health nurses at the Pullman were available 24-hours.

My experience at the COVID Hotel

- 30 I served as the Site Security Manager for Nexar at the COVID Hotel between 23 June and 13 July 2020.
- 31 I was re-deployed to the COVID Hotel in recognition of my hard work at the Pullman, and because I had a background in emergency services.
- 32 The COVID Hotel operated differently to the Pullman, as it housed only COVID-positive patients. As such, it was run like a hospital ward.
- 33 However, my day-to-day responsibilities at the COVID Hotel site were similar to my duties at the Pullman. My duties at the COVID Hotel included:
- (a) Attending the “touchpoint” meetings (outlined at paragraph 34 below);
 - (b) Ensuring that all of the guards were compliant, which required checking their security licences and ensuring that they had completed any online and on-site training, which we then recorded in a training register;
 - (c) Co-ordinating the daily PPE training sessions;
 - (d) Monitoring the foyer to ensure that social distancing was adhered to, that correct PPE was being worn, and that the screening processes were taking place (which included

temperature checks and running any people entering the hotel through the designated list of questions from Alfred Health).

34 Every shift we had two “touchpoint” meetings with DHHS, at 10:00am and 3:30pm. Team leaders at the COVID Hotel, including myself, the Alfred Health security guard supervisor, the DHHS Authorised Officer (**AO**), the Hotel Manager, and the cleaning staff team leader would come together to discuss the last 24 hours at the hotel. It was a great opportunity to understand and manage the changing dynamics at the hotel.

35 There were also “toolbox” meetings for security guards conducted prior to each shift.

Chain of Command

36 The COVID Hotel was run by Alfred Health and they were brilliant. Alfred Health has its own private security provider, who oversaw the security arrangements. I was still employed by Nexar, but on-shift, I reported into Alfred Health’s security provider.

Training and induction

37 There was a very strict induction process for all the security guards coming to work at the COVID Hotel, which was coordinated by Alfred Health’s security provider.

38 Prior to starting a shift at the hotel, security guards were required to do a 2-hour online course. At the completion of this course, new starters would get a certificate and they were required to send a screenshot of this certificate to the supervisor who’d rostered them on.

39 We recognised that an inherent problem with online courses is that it was possible for someone else to complete the course for you. So, when the security guards arrived at the toolbox meeting before their very first shift, we would ask them questions from the online course, for example about PPE, to check their knowledge.

40 You had to try and pick up on their cues. If I could see that someone didn’t know something, they would immediately be required to undertake a 30-minute training session about PPE.

41 The Alfred Health nurses trained the other supervisors and I about the PPE requirements for the site and generally we would train the new starters, but in some circumstances the nursing team leader would directly provide this training to the new guards.

42 Once a new starter was checked in at the toolbox meeting at the start of their shift, they would be deployed onto a floor of the hotel. At the COVID Hotel, there were 12 floors that needed monitoring, with a guard on each floor.

43 We were conscious to place people on floors based on their experience and personality. There were some floors that were not considered “active” as they had no patients staying on that floor. We put the less experienced guards in these areas. In contrast, some floors had guests who were quite challenging to work with or were quite emotionally distressed given the situation. We would put a guard with a stronger personality on these floors, who could handle these types of situations.

Infection control procedures

44 There were strict infection control procedures in place at the COVID Hotel. As I mentioned earlier, the COVID Hotel was run like a hospital ward.

45 Anyone entering the COVID Hotel was temperature checked. It was methodical and regimented – “army-like”.

46 There were designated “Green Zones” and “Red Zones” throughout the hotel. The Green Zones were “safe” zones or “COVID-free” zones. The Red Zones or the “dirty areas” of the hotel were potential “COVID hot spots”. These included floors where guests were staying and some of the lifts (which were specifically allocated as “dirty lifts”).

47 There were strict procedures in place to ensure that the Green Zones remained COVID-free. For example, if a security guard was going on one of their designated breaks, they had to dispose of their mask and any other PPE in the yellow infectious waste bins on the floor they were on (which was considered a Red Zone), before entering a lift that was designated as a Green Zone.

48 Once you were in a Green Zone, you could walk around freely.

49 The Mezzanine level of the hotel was a dedicated Green Zone. We were not allowed to enter the Mezzanine area wearing a mask which had been worn on a floor. There was a dedicated room for security guards on the Mezzanine level. The Mezzanine also contained dedicated rooms for other staff including nurses, AOs and DHHS.

50 Guards could go to this dedicated room in their breaks and make a cup of tea. The space was set up per the Alfred Health infection control procedures. We removed up to 80% of the chairs previously in the room, to ensure appropriate social distancing in the space. This was also the space that the 30-minute PPE training for the guards was conducted.

51 The communal space for the guards was a great place for everyone to debrief. We did not have a space like this at the Pullman.

52 I also really liked talking to the nurses, given my background. You could see that dealing with patients took an emotional toll on people. It was a very stressful time. The nurses dealt with people in very emotional situations, like situations where young kids had transmitted COVID-19 to a grandparent, resulting in the grandparent needing to be transferred to hospital.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and training

53 As mentioned above, PPE training was generally provided to the security supervisors by the Alfred Health nurses. In turn, the supervisors trained the security guards. However, to ensure that my guards had a good understanding, I would sometimes arrange 1:1 meetings with an Alfred Health nurse team leader and groups of 6-8 people.

54 The PPE requirements at the COVID Hotel were very strict. For example, all the security guards were required to be clean shaven to ensure their masks fit correctly. The nurses were extremely good at identifying security guards who did not understand the requirements and they would check the guards' PPE to make sure everything fit.

55 It was standard practice that anyone who was in the lobby for more than 5 minutes, was required to wear a mask, and either glasses, goggles or a face-shield.

56 Security guards who were monitoring an active COVID floor were also required to wear a mask and glasses the entire time. They were not able to consume food or drinks on the floor as they would have to take their mask off to do this. Mask changeovers occurred every 4-hours when the guards were on their breaks. The moment you took your mask off, it had to go in the bin. We were always told to "treat our masks as COVID."

57 Guards were not required to wear gloves as it was believed that gloves created a "false sense of security". However, people were advised to regularly sanitise their hands. For example, if you touched your mask, you had to sanitize.

58 If a security guard was likely to have direct contact with a COVID positive patient or could otherwise not maintain a distance of 1.5m, they had to be wearing full PPE (which included a surgical mask, face shield, disposable gown, and gloves). After such contacts, all PPE needed to be disposed of in a yellow infectious waste bin.

59 One example of potential direct contact was during patient transfers into and out of the hotel. Patient transfers triggered a "Code Red" scenario for the entire foyer area. Transfers had strict procedural requirements and needed to be co-ordinated with DHHS. No-one was allowed to enter the foyer area while the transfer was taking place, with the exception of those directly involved in the transfer. During a transfer, we would put guards on the street to stop people

walking past. Once a person had been transferred, the cleaners would, in full PPE, complete a thorough cleaning procedure in the foyer and on the floor that the patient was transferred from or to. The full cleaning procedure included cleaning all touchpoints and the floors. No-one was allowed into the foyer until the clean was completed.

60 I did not experience any issues with access to PPE.

Testing and dealing with Mental Health issues

61 At the COVID Hotel, nurses were constantly testing people and constantly checking their welfare, because they were COVID-positive.

62 One thing that helped at the COVID Hotel was that every room had a balcony. In contrast, rooms at the Pullman had a balcony and only some had windows. This assisted to manage the mental health of patients who smoked because they had easy access to smoking facilities, rather than being restricted by regular fresh-air breaks.

Transfer to Corrections Victoria

63 While I was serving at the COVID Hotel, the dynamics of the whole situation changed. Prior to the stories breaking on the news, security guards walked around with pride because they felt like they were really contributing. When the stories about the security guards broke, it affected how we were perceived.

64 After the Premier's announcement, a person from Corrections Victoria (**Corrections**) was installed for four days, from 30 June 2020, to review the situation at the COVID Hotel. They monitored the operations of the hotel and other matters, including potential breaches of PPE procedures.

65 We received conflicting information from Corrections about the use of PPE. The main supervisor from Corrections advised us there was no need to wear a mask in the lobby, despite that some guards would sit in the lobby for up to 12-hours at a time. I also observed that the Corrections supervisor would not wear a mask while sitting in the lobby, where they spent a substantial amount of their time. Corrections advised the guards that they should only wear their masks for up to 2-hours at a time, when we were previously advised that this was for 4-hours at a time. I felt that the PPE advice was constantly changing, so I had a 1:1 conversation with the Corrections staff and the nurses, to get some clarity.

66 Alfred Health advised that the correct procedure was that masks must always be worn in the lobby, if a person was in the space for 5 minutes or more. They further clarified that a mask changeover should occur every 4-hours.

67 Corrections Victoria formally took over the operations of the COVID Hotel on about 14 July 2020. About 40 guards lost their jobs on that day.

Concluding remarks

68 My final remarks relate to the rights of guards. There were guards completing 12-hour shifts in a challenging environment and dealing with difficult issues. During my time working in the Quarantine hotels I was asked to fire three guards.

69 One was fired, without notice, for speaking with an Age journalist. It was really distressing for her, as she felt that she was not properly briefed on the confidentiality requirements. The decision was made by the Alfred Health security provider.

70 Another was fired for not adhering to PPE requirements.

71 A third was let go for falling asleep on-shift. I reiterate that it was a difficult for guards to be sitting on a floor, which was no bigger than a hallway in a house, opposite a lift, in a mask and goggles, and attempt to stay awake for 12 hours straight.

72 The company I worked for, Nexar, fired me on the day before Corrections took over the site. This excused them from paying my sick leave entitlements, as any guard working at a Quarantine Hotel or COVID site had to commit to 14 days of self-isolation before working another job.

Signature



Print name CRAIG ARUNDEL

Date

21/8/2020