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Minn. medical workers in short supply

Gains gone after 2 years of pandemic

BY CHRISTOPHER MAGAN
St. Paul Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL — Nearly two years of pandemic working conditions have wiped out major gains in Minnesota's health care workforce, leaving the state with a critical shortage that has no end in sight.

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of people licensed to work as nurses in the state grew by 43,400, or 35%. But as the coronavirus pandemic has dragged on, huge numbers of

health care workers have left the bedside, leaving the state with thousands of job openings as patient numbers have swelled.

"In certain areas, the situation is very dire," said Anthony Schaffhauser, workforce development director for HealthForce Minnesota, which the Minnesota State higher education system created in 2005 to grow the state's health care workforce to meet the needs of an aging population.

"The long-term care industry

is in crisis, without a doubt," he said. "It is to the point where they deployed the National Guard."

Hospitals have needed help, too.

At least four teams of doctors and nurses from the U.S. Department of Defense have been in the state to help overburdened hospitals care for patients. Last month, Gov. Tim Walz agreed to a \$40 million contract with a temporary staffing agency to bring 200

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John Autey / St. Paul Pioneer Press

Nurses gather in one of the wards at Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul on March 26, 2020.

ASKED & ANSWERED

Managing music on the road with Carr

Rochesterite has worked for Acoustic Idolon since 2019

BY JOHN SIEVERS
For the Post Bulletin

Having Carr as a last name doesn't hurt if you're destined to become a band's tour manager like Rochesterite Deana Carr.

However, in spite of all the driving she's done, if you'd like to see roadrunners while walking through petroglyphs and visit Florence, Colorado, the home of the only Super Max prison in the United States, then she might have your dream job because these are just a few of the experiences she's encountered while on the road.

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Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Robert Kinney, who worked from home as a data analyst, was recently fired from his job at Mayo Clinic because he refused to be vaccinated for COVID-19. Kinney said he was told by his doctor he couldn't have vaccines because of a stem cell transplant he received to treat multiple sclerosis. Kinney is photographed Friday at his home in Rochester.

Fired for failure to comply

Kinney doesn't know why he didn't get medical exemption

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER
A month after being terminated from Mayo Clinic for failing to follow its vaccine policy, Robert Kinney of Rochester betrays little bitterness over the loss of his job.

He says he would return to work if Mayo called him back.

"If my boss at Mayo called me up tomorrow and said, 'There was a clerical error. Can you please come back to work?' Yeah, I'd come back to work tomorrow," Kinney said.

Kinney became one of the estimated 700 people to lose their jobs for failing to comply with the clinic's vaccine mandate. Yet it remains a mystery to this 52-year-old father of three why he didn't qualify for an exemption from the mandate both for medical and work-related reasons.

Kinney, a one-time Mayo quality associate, worked from home in his basement and posed no risk to the clinic's patients or employees.

In 2018, Kinney was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis by his Mayo primary care physician. Prescribed medicine that he was told could only slow the disease's progress, not stop it, Kinney pursued a more aggressive option. In 2019, he was accepted into a clinical trial at Northwestern University for a stem cell treatment.

Kinney returned home and was found to no longer have the disease. But the Northwestern doctor was emphatic on one point.

"The doctor there said, 'whatever you do, don't get a vaccine or anything that will tempt your immune system to overact, because that could start your MS coming back'," Kinney said. "It's in remission, and we want it to

stay in remission forever."

Then, COVID-19 hit, and Mayo issued its mandate that all employees and staff get the vaccine or obtain a medical or religious exemption.

At first, Kinney thought he would be cleared for a medical exemption. His Mayo primary care physician, he said, signed the form for an exemption request. But then later, the physician called Kinney at home to say he had changed his mind. After speaking with two other doctors, he had decided that Kinney should get the COVID-19 vaccine after all, Kinney said.

Kinney was denied an exemption. He appealed and was rejected. He sought a religious exemption with the same results.

Kinney said he found the process contradictory and incomprehensible in another way. Soon after being hired by Mayo in July of last year, Kinney gave a blood draw that

showed he had no vaccine for tetanus, mumps or measles as a result of his stem cell procedure.

Despite the absence of these vaccine protections in his system, Kinney was granted an accommodation because he worked from home.

"The occupational health person (at Mayo) said, 'Oh, it doesn't matter, because you work at home.'"

A Mayo Clinic spokesperson said the clinic is not able to discuss individual employment cases with third parties, but said the decision to include remote workers in its vaccine policy was consistent with its values.

"Mayo Clinic transitioned to a required COVID-19 vaccination program for all staff to advance the primary value of Mayo Clinic — the needs of the patient come first," said

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DAILY



ANSWERMAN

Mayowood Apartments opening delayed by staffing shortage

I frequently drive past the new Mayowood Apartments on Mayowood Road and have noticed the parking lot is totally empty. I thought it was built to house homeless or low-income people, but apparently there is nobody living there, even in the brutally cold climate. What's going on with the building? — SW Rochester resident

While a grand opening was held in October, the apartments are indeed sitting empty and the reason appears to be lack of staff, rather than a lack of tenants.

I asked one of my minions to reach out to Duluth-based Center City Housing Corp., which owns the 30-unit complex that will provide supportive housing for people who struggle with homelessness and behavioral health issues.

Nancy Cashman, Center City's executive director, told him she's mortified that the building hasn't been able to open.

The primary hang up is staffing the building's front desk, which will provide 24-hour, in-person support to ensure the safety of future residents.

"We are having trouble



Post Bulletin file photo

Nancy Cashman, executive director of Center City Housing, speaks Oct. 26 during a grand opening for a supportive housing project at Mayowood Apartments in Rochester.

filling that position all over the state, but especially in Rochester

right now," she said.

Similar staff members are also being sought

at Silver Creek Corner, which Center City operates to house up to 40 homeless chronic alcoholics at a time.

In case you're interested in filling one of the part-time positions, you can send a resume and cover letter to Judy Aspling at Center City Housing Corp., 105 1/2 W. First St., Duluth MN 55802, or by fax to 218-720-3483 or by email to jasppling@centercityhousing.org.

Once staff is in place, Mayowood Apartments will provide housing stability for people who have been determined to be the most difficult to house in a traditional setting, often due to

special needs that go beyond what a landlord typically offers.

In addition to the 24-hour front-desk support, staff at the site will offer case management, transportation, advocacy and referral to community resources.

Cashman said the full-time Mayowood staff is in place, so residents will start being accepted once the final part-time positions are filled, which she hopes will be by March 1.

Send questions for the Answer Man to answerman@postbulletin.com.

MINNESOTA BRIEF

TEEN SHOT AT BIRTHDAY PARTY AMID MELEE INVOLVING ABOUT 100 PEOPLE

ST. PAUL — A birthday party Saturday night in St. Paul "got out of hand" and turned violent, resulting in a teenager being shot amid a melee involving dozens of people along with windows at an event center getting shot out, authorities said.

About 9:35 p.m. Saturday, 911 calls reported a shooting at the events complex on the 500 block of Snelling Avenue, St. Paul Police

Department spokesman Steve Linders said.

When officers arrived, they found a 16-year-old who had been shot in the leg by another person at the event. He was taken to Regions hospital and is expected to survive.

After shooting the victim, the assailant ran out of the building and then turned to fire a dozen more times, blasting out several windows.

Police found as many as 100 people fighting outside the center and worked to de-escalate the violence and disperse

the crowd, according to Linders.

"Our officers rushed into an incredibly chaotic scene, with a confrontational crowd that attempted to prevent them from reaching the victim," Linders said Sunday. "We had two people dumping more than a dozen shots into a crowded building. We had about a hundred people fighting in the streets."

"We pulled every available squad to help calm things down," he said. "And we're incredibly

lucky that only one person was injured. It was a dangerous situation, something no neighborhood should ever have to experience."

Police learned that a manager at the event center had turned away people earlier in the night because they had been trying to bring guns inside, but "at some point a gun made it inside" and the situation quickly "got out of hand," police said.

The incident remained under investigation Sunday.

St. Paul Pioneer Press

Carr

From page A1

Carr started working as the tour manager for the musical duo Acoustic Eidolon in 2019. Acoustic Eidolon is a musical group consisting of cellist and singer Hannah Alkire and guitjo (a custom 14 string double-neck guitar with one neck strung like a banjo) player and singer Joe Scott. The husband-and-wife team perform all over the United States and internationally.

Carr helps make their hectic touring smooth.

How did you become a tour manager and what prepared you for it?

I worked for Rochester Civic Music for 25 years doing production work and working backstage with all groups that we brought in for concerts. I worked with Acoustic Eidolon for a week-long residency in February 2019. We hit it off immediately. They liked my work ethic and that I understood the production aspect of the job. They had been looking for someone to work with them, doing all the same things that I did during the week they were here. They asked me if I would consider working with them.

What are some of the duties you normally complete when Acoustic Eidolon goes on tour?

Acoustic Eidolon drives to performances all over the country. I fly to Colorado and I help them drive to all the gigs. I haul equipment into the venue, set up the stage and the CD table, run sound during most shows, and sell CDs. Then I strike the stage, pack equipment and instruments away, and help load everything back into the van and drive to the next location.

I assist Joe and Hannah other ways during a tour by helping them prepare for the show backstage, helping check in and load into hotels along the way, and balance out CD sales



Contributed / Deana Carr

Deana Carr backstage while on the road with the musical duo Acoustic Eidolon. Carr has been the group's tour manager since 2019.

every night.

What skills are needed for your work with the band?

Obviously, the production skills come in handy — setting everything up and running sound during the show. Being organized helps with many aspects throughout the tours. Everywhere we go, people love Joe and Hannah and their music, so I try to do what I can to make it easier for them to play their music onstage and not worry about anything else. It helps to like to drive, too. On one tour, we did shows from Colorado to Florida in less than three weeks. We drove 3,600 miles to get to Florida. They flew me home from there and drove the rest of the way back to Colorado.

Any difficult situations you helped navigate the band through while on tour?

COVID provided some challenges of not being on the road, but Acoustic Eidolon was very creative and did concerts in their mini-van in their driveway during quarantine. I drove to Colorado and

helped with that. They also performed many Zoom concerts from their studio in Colorado, and I facilitated most of them from my office in my house in Minnesota.

What's it like traveling long distances with the band?

One interesting thing we did in February 2020 was while traveling from Texas to Florida. We drove across the southern part of the country and had breakfast in Texas, lunch in Louisiana, dinner in Mississippi, dessert in Alabama, and breakfast the next morning 24 hours later in Florida. In March 2020 we started off to Arizona. Before everything shut down, we found ourselves "standing on a corner in Winslow, Arizona." Being a big Eagles fan, I enjoyed that quick stop along the way.

What's been your favorite show memory with the band?

One that sticks out is the Glen Eyrie castle concerts in Colorado Springs. It's an actual castle nestled in the Rocky Mountains. In December it is decorated for Christmas and is

beautiful. My lodging was a cabin in the middle of the woods. I woke up in the morning to see mountains and wild turkeys outside my window.

When you aren't busy with the band, what are some of your other passions?

Music and sports have always been passions of mine since I was a kid. I play clarinet with a community band, woodwind quintet, and as half of a clarinet duo. I grew up in the Detroit area and am a huge Detroit sports fan, especially the Tigers. I have attended spring training in Florida for over 30 years, and have played in 14 Detroit Tigers Fantasy Camps in Florida and one in Tiger Stadium in Detroit. A thrill for me in 2019 was to throw out the first pitch at a Tigers baseball game in Detroit.

Asked & Answered is a weekly question-and-answer column featuring people of southeastern Minnesota. Is there somebody you'd like to see featured? Send suggestions to news@postbulletin.com.



Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Robert Kinney, who worked from home as a data analyst, was recently fired from his job at Mayo Clinic because he refused to be vaccinated for COVID-19. Kinney said he was told by his doctor he couldn't have vaccines because of a stem cell transplant he received to treat multiple sclerosis. Kinney is photographed Friday at his home in Rochester.

Kinney

From page A1

Mayo spokeswoman Kelley Luckstein. "No matter where staff are located, unexpected absences due to COVID-19 exposures and diagnoses are a threat to business continuity, and hence, serving our patients, regardless of role."

"This is a time when Mayo Clinic must stand firmly behind the evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 vaccines to help protect the health and safety of our patients, workforce, visitors, and communities. Based on science and data, it's clear that vaccination keeps people out of the hospital and saves lives."

Kinney can only speculate as to why Mayo's remote employees fell under the same policy that affected nurses and doctors.

"I know I'm not as vital as a nurse or a doctor, so I can honestly see that that would be a smart business decision to say, 'we have 90 percent of our people vaccinated,'" Kinney said. "Who is expendable? I am expendable."

On Jan. 3, Kinney received an email from Mayo saying it was taking "corrective action" for his non-compliance with its vaccine policy. He was being terminated.

Soon afterward, Kinney returned his badge, laptop and other equipment to the clinic.

"I went into an empty (Plummer) building and just left a bag full of my stuff on my boss's desk," Kinney said. "It was kind of sad, because when I worked there, I took great pride in working there. When I was hired at Mayo Clinic, I thought this is a really good thing, I'm supporting the No. 1 hospital in the world."

It hasn't taken long for Kinney to bounce back from his employment setback. A licensed certified public accountant with two master's degrees, Kinney began teaching full-time at Rochester Community and Technical College.

"They always need someone to teach accounting and statistics," Kinney said.

And starting Wednesday, he will begin work as a process engineer at New York University in Manhattan. He will be making twice what he was paid at Mayo and will work remotely.

Kinney said he has been invited to join a lawsuit against Mayo that some former Mayo employees have considered filing, but he declined the invitation.

"I'd rather just move on with life and be happy," he said.

Contact reporter Matthew Stolle at mstolle@postbulletin.com.

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