



Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Kim Michalsky. I'm a nurse at CVH I started working in direct patient care for state of Connecticut at Mansfield Training School in July 1981. I transferred to Connecticut Valley Hospital in 1988.

My roots in mental health go much deeper than that. My mother was a nurse, she started her career as a nurse at Middlesex hospital. She transferred to CVH and I can remember dropping supper off to her while she took care of her patients. I will never forget the care that she took with her patients. They always came first.

My mother sacrificed so much for her patients. She gave tireless service to the state of Connecticut – she worked through holidays, she missed our recitals. She used to say “I'm fortunate to have been able to help the few I have – if I have just helped one person have a better life, I'm grateful for that.”

My grandmother also worked at CVH. My mother would drop me off, and she would go to work at Middlesex. I would sit in the Nursing Supervisor's office, coloring in time sheets and talking to patients. My grandmother would make soup and bring it in from home for a catatonic patient who wouldn't eat. She would tell the patient please don't make me look like a fool in front of my granddaughter. The patient would look at me, smile and eat. My grandmother would say – she's a person, just like you or I, and she deserves to be taken care of.

I never thought there was anything different about people who had mental illness. I never thought they were contagious. I always thought they should have the best care they should have. My grandmother and my mother spent many hours caring for these people as have I. I stay with mentally ill patients at CVH because I love being a nurse and caring for my patients.

The reason I'm here today is to talk to you about the working conditions at CVH. Years ago we staffed the units properly. There were nurses on the units available for patient care. We trained people to take care of patients. Today instead of trainings, we get memos for all staff to sign. When I started, we had actual hands-on trainings, where we were able to ask questions. We had enough nurses that they could provide education to those who needed it. The state encouraged people to continue their education, to attend trainings, and that's fallen by the wayside.

Nurses are required to document and chart more than ever in the past. We are responsible for what other people do, we are responsible for the safety of everyone on the unit, and when there is only one Registered Nurse on the unit, it is impossible for us to attend to patients and finish the necessary paperwork.

When my mother was assaulted years ago it was a rare occurrence. I can distinctly remember when people were hurt. Now – it occurs so frequently I can't remember who got hurt in what instance.

The lack of training and the level of short staffing is disgraceful. You can't expect a new nurse, a nurse transferring in, or any person new to the patients at CVH to come with the training that is necessary. We are taking care of the sickest, most acutely ill patients in the state of CT and we're not given the tools or the safe environment in which to care for these people who so desperately deserve care.

I've seen patients in the past get better and do well in the community, and lead full productive lives. We need funding to provide the tools for our employees so they can take care of the patients at CVH. Just like my grandmother and my mother told me, "these are people, you need to remember – you never know when you or a loved one will wind up in the same situation." And you certainly would want for them to get the very best care available. We have staff at CVH that are more than willing to provide the care but they just need the tools and the funding.

I'd like to close with a Clara Barton quote: "I have an almost complete disregard of precedent and a faith in the possibility of something better. It irritates me to be told how things have always been done. I defy the tyranny of precedent. I go for anything new that might improve the past." Please support increasing the budget for mental health, so we can change the pattern of shrinking the budget for mental health care. Thank you for your time.