



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 2

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### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 10: Dr. Heather Church**

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[0:00:00]

**Geneviève Eliany**

The next witness is definitely virtual. I see that she's being queued up here. Heather, are you with us?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yes, I'm here. Sorry.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Great. I know we're running a bit late so let us know if you're having any difficulties. Could you spell and state your name for the record please?

**Dr. Heather Church**

My name is Heather Church, H-E-A-T-H-E-R C-H-U-R-C-H.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Do you promise to tell the truth today?

**Dr. Heather Church**

I do, yes.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Now, you are a health sciences professor, and you taught Pandemics and Society. Is that right?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Correct.

**Geneviève Eliany**

That was the name of the course?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yeah. Pandemics and their Impacts on Society.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Great. And you also completed a PhD dissertation about health equity impacts of public policy?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Correct, yeah.

**Geneviève Eliany**

And until the COVID mandates came along, you were teaching at a university, right?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yeah, I submitted against my will to the vaccine mandates and did teach until I went on sick leave in August 2022. And I've been off since then. And I just received confirmation of a diagnosis a couple of weeks ago, that it was vaccination-related.

**Geneviève Eliany**

So let's discuss that vaccine injury. Your main reason for being reluctant, as I understand it, was that you already had a mild traumatic brain injury, right?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Correct. And that puts me at higher likelihood of neurodegenerative disorders—but also earlier age of onset thereof. I also have a family history of neurodegenerative disorder, so that's two strikes against me. And my concern was the cumulative effects of strikes against me earlier. I don't have any more room to add injury to my neurological system. And so I was afraid because these have not been tested for neurological effects. And at the time that the mandates were implemented, they were only in Phase II of the four-phase clinical trial process. So I just felt that there wasn't enough known about the risks. And since I was at low risk for COVID, it didn't strike me as necessary. But also at that time too, there was already evidence demonstrating that the vaccines wouldn't prevent transmission, so it really was just a personal choice.

**Geneviève Eliany**

We won't dwell on this point, but can you confirm that you tried to have both a religious and medical exemption approved by your employer and you were unsuccessful?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yes, that's correct. I submitted a religious request for exemption and with that I had to sign a sworn affidavit and it was rejected. And I was told that it was—that my position was politicized. And when I asked my union for assistance, they upheld the decision.

So then I also sought assistance getting a medical exemption. I went to my family doctor and I took in a stack of peer-reviewed journal articles to support my point. And he wouldn't even look at them. He told me that the College had banned them from providing exemptions for anything but anaphylaxis, myocarditis, and pericarditis—wouldn't consider it, wouldn't hear me out, and yeah, frankly, behaved very unprofessionally. Then, when I explained this to my union again, they told me that they didn't believe that doctors had been banned and to try again.

**Geneviève Eliany**

You've since been diagnosed with an auditory processing disorder. And we've heard that you've been on sick leave since August 2022. Can you describe the everyday effects of the injury?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Okay, so for clarification, the Auditory Processing Disorder, that was with a neuro-psychological assessment that was conducted where she identified a few impairments: some fine motor coordination, auditory processing, and some memory issues.

[00:05:00]

All came out as impaired. She couldn't tie it to the traumatic brain injury because those symptoms would have shown up at that time. But that was three and a half years before getting the vaccine. And I didn't have those problems until the day after getting the vaccines.

For the auditory processing piece, the issue is that I don't filter out sounds naturally. So people who don't have impaired auditory processing are able to filter out environmental sounds. For instance, if you're at a restaurant, someone's laughing in the background, you hear a fork drop on the floor, it doesn't impede your ability to communicate or to continue doing what you're doing because your brain's naturally filtering those noises out. So you're attending to only the sounds that you need to hear. And my auditory processing now is impaired.

In addition to that, since getting the doses, I also had what's described as bounding heart rate. So it would be where—just intermittently and unpredictably—I could see my pulse just bonking out of my neck. And it was really hard and really scary. So I gave up exercise. I used to be a very active person and I gave it up because I was afraid. And I've since been diagnosed with what's called postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, or POTS. And what that is is basically, when you change positions from reclining or sitting to standing up, you get a clinically significant elevation in your heart rate. So it's a 30 per cent increase in your heart rate.

I've also been diagnosed— It's a separate diagnosis by a neurologist as well and it's called, it's a big one: distal chronic-acquired demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy. I don't really understand that one yet. I had to go to the States to get that diagnosis because I've been on

a waitlist since September to see a neurologist here in Canada. And the earliest appointment I can get is August 28th, 2023.

**Geneviève Eliany**

And what will happen if you are unable to get a Canadian confirmation of the American diagnoses?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Well, currently I switched from short-term disability in November, so I'm now considered long-term disability. But my long-term disability provider rejected my claim, stating that they didn't see that there were limitations that would impede me from doing 60 per cent or more of my workload. And WSIB [the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board] would also need a Canadian-confirmed diagnosis and recognition of vaccination causation for it to be considered a workplace injury.

And my contract ends in June but I'm not employable at the moment. I'm injured. And I'm going to have lifelong issues, including the distal chronic-acquired demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy. If not treated early, it has a one in three chance of ending up being wheelchair bound. And I don't even know what early treatment means because I can't access anyone who has that knowledge.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Can you describe your average day now? How do you feel and what kind of symptoms do you have?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Tired, sad, chronic headache, chronic pain. I have incessant tinnitus that just is all through my head. Dizziness, nausea. My limbs feel heavy. I'm tripping over things; I'm fumbling things with my hands. I feel incompetent.

**Geneviève Eliany**

When you participated in a one-day training about a week ago—and take your time—how did you manage that day and how did you feel afterwards?

**Dr. Heather Church**

I didn't do well. I tried it. I wanted to see if I could work a full workday. I couldn't sit still. I couldn't pay attention. It was awful. It was really well done. The people were lovely.

[00:10:00]

But I crashed. And this is the problem. Even just going to church or going out with my parents to a restaurant, I get so tired and so withdrawn that I cannot function. I can't communicate because I'm just so busy trying to focus and pay attention to what's important and not pay attention to everything else. I can't keep up.

My parents actually did notice that I withdrew into myself. And they thought that I was unhappy with the meal or unhappy with the setting. It wasn't that at all. It was, just, I was overwhelmed. I couldn't handle it.

**Geneviève Eliany**

What kind of treatments, if any, have you tried?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Well, I started out seeing a psychologist and I initiated that in July last year and started seeing her in August. But she's also— I did the neuropsychological assessment with her and maxed out my benefits at that point using that. And then had to pay an additional \$2,500 on top of that. So I haven't been able to access anything.

But now I do have benefits. But since I don't have any disposable income, my parents have loaned me money so I can start paying for things like physiotherapy. I have made a referral to a neurological rehab clinic in Burlington, so hopefully that will help. And I'm resuming my psychology appointments next week.

**Geneviève Eliany**

I understand that you filed some complaints, both against the College of Pharmacists and against your doctor. Have you seen any lights at the end of the tunnel with respect to those complaints?

**Dr. Heather Church**

No, no. I filed a complaint against the doctor for his unprofessional behavior, which I frankly think is malpractice. But I don't know that for sure. And the College contacted me and asked me to indicate dates when I could have a phone meeting. At that point, I just didn't have the wherewithal. And so I asked them to just provide the information because they just wanted to have a meeting to explain the process. I said, "Well, just provide me with a write up of what it is, because surely you do that for people who are nonverbal and can't participate in a telephone meeting." And I never heard from them again.

So then two months later, I emailed them and asked what was going on. And they said that the registrar had closed the file.

Then, with the College of Pharmacists of Ontario, I filed a complaint. Because on the consent form there were only two options: if you wanted to receive your confirmation of vaccination by text or by email. And so I created another box and checked it and wrote beside it, "I do not consent to digital communication of my private and confidential health information. Please send it by mail only." And I ended up getting text messages from the pharmacy notifying me when it was time to get my second dose, notifying me when it was time to get boosters, notifying me of sales they were having. So it was even promotional content; they didn't separate out promotions from health information.

So I filed a complaint against them. I filed a complaint with the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, who has noted that they were in their right to do so. But I still challenge that because there's no reason that I should be getting text messages about sales that they're having. And I'm still awaiting a decision by the College.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Thank you. I'll turn it over to the commissioners to see if they have any questions.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

First, thank you for coming out and talking to us about this most intimate issue that you have and having the courage to stand up in front of us, in front of all of Canada. My first question has to do with— I believe that prior to this, you were a professor teaching a course in pandemics and the effect of pandemics on society?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Correct.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

In your class, or in your studies preparing for your class, were you aware of any nationwide pandemic plan or reviews of different options that may have been contained in that plan?

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yes, so I did look at the SARS response and that sort of thing. But we also covered historical pandemics as well.

[00:15:00]

And I was trying to sort of avoid—initially, the first couple years I taught it I wanted to avoid getting too deep into COVID because I felt that there was a lot of hysteria around it and I didn't want to drive that fearful narrative. But then in the second year of teaching it I had a day where we were just talking and the students were hungry for the other side of the story. So we started talking about the other side of the story. After that, the students really opened up to me about their own experiences and about—you know, thanking me for being a safe place to talk. So we discussed science and it was all science-based that we were discussing.

But yeah, sorry, I've gone off track. Sorry, what was the question?

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Don't worry, I'm always off track. Really, specifically, what I meant to ask you was: Were you aware of the Canadian Influenza Pandemic Plan that was in place? And I believe one of the authors was Theresa Tam.

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yes, I am aware of it. Yeah. We didn't cover it in that class though.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Okay. Do you know whether or not your adverse reaction has been registered in the CAEFISS [Canadian Adverse Events Following Immunization Surveillance] System in Canada?

**Dr. Heather Church**

I'm still in the process. I need to get that Canadian confirmation of diagnosis before I can submit it. I've started the paperwork for the AEFI [adverse event following immunization]. And so Public Health is awaiting my diagnosis and the paperwork for that before they will process.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

So that's been in process now for a year or better? How long has that been in process?

**Dr. Heather Church**

I think I initiated it—I don't remember when I initiated that. I guess it would have been November or December 2022.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

You talked a little bit about your experience in getting the vaccine. And if I understood you correctly, you got it in a pharmacy.

**Dr. Heather Church**

Correct.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Do you feel that the pharmacist, or whoever administered the vaccine, had given you all of the information about the risks and benefits of this vaccine so that you could form an informed consent when you received it?

**Dr. Heather Church**

No. I got the provincial little write-up, but a) they're still experimental, so there's not enough information to make an informed decision. But b) on the consent form, another thing was the pharmacist had already digitally checked off the null box in the adverse reaction section of the consent form, which I thought was weird. But there's also no information about what to do if there is an adverse reaction and what those adverse reactions will be.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Normally, when you purchase a drug in the restaurant— Or sorry, it's the pharmacy. Sorry. Normally, when you receive a prescription drug, there's an insert in that prescription drug that describes to you— Even whether or not the pharmacist goes through it with you, there is an insert that tells you all of the risks and issues concerning that drug. Were you given access to any kind of an insert or information bulletin directly from the manufacturer of the vaccine prior to taking it?

**Dr. Heather Church**

No.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Thank you very much.

**Geneviève Eliany**

Thank you very much for sharing your story today with the National Citizens Inquiry. It's very much appreciated and I hope that you find some treatments that will help you.

**Dr. Heather Church**

Yes, thank you very much. And thank you for this opportunity.

[00:19:11]



***Final Review and Approval:*** Jodi Bruhn, August 16, 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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