



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Red Deer, AB

Day 1

April 26, 2023

### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 1: Joelle Valliere**

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[00:00:00]

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, Joelle, this is awkward because we can't really see each other. We'll be looking at each other on screens. But can you please state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name?

**Joelle Valliere**

My name is Joelle Valliere, J-O-E-L-L-E V-A-L-L-I-E-R-E.

**Shawn Buckley**

And, Joelle, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

**Joelle Valliere**

I do.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you are a wife and a mother of three?

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

And you're also a funeral director and an embalmer.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

You've been embalming since 2008 and you have 15 years' experience as a funeral director.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you're here to testify today about being injured by the vaccine. I wanted to start by asking you why did you take the vaccine? What was going on that led you to take it?

**Joelle Valliere**

I felt I needed to take it because of my work. I didn't know if COVID remained on a deceased human person. I needed to protect myself. I needed to protect my colleagues, my family, my community. We were caring for my 92-year-old father-in-law at the time. I didn't want to cause any harm to him. We like to travel. And so that's why I chose to be vaccinated.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, when you went to get vaccinated what were you told? So were you told about side effects? Do you think you were properly informed about the risk?

**Joelle Valliere**

No, what I was informed about was just given to me on a sheet of paper. And, you know, the typical sore arm and possible site redness and inflammation.

**Shawn Buckley**

David, can you pull up what's on my computer screen, just so that the witness and the commissioners can see.

So you provided me, actually, with a copy of the form that you were given when you went to get vaccinated. And so at the top there's a heading, "Side Effects," which lists redness, warmth, swelling, bruising, (going below) feeling tired or unwell, headache, fever, chills, body aches, feeling sick to your stomach, swollen lymph nodes—things that really don't sound very significant. And then there's a list of "Rare" for AstraZeneca, but you didn't get the AstraZeneca, so those wouldn't apply to you. So do you remember that this is basically all you were told, were these rather minor side effects?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Now, my understanding is it was April 28, 2021 where you received your first shot of the Pfizer vaccine. Can you tell us what happened?

**Joelle Valliere**

So my husband and I both went in on April 28th to be vaccinated. We went together, and the very next day my left leg was inflamed. I had swelling in the left leg. I went to the hospital in Drayton Valley. They examined. There was no blood clot—that was my fear.

**Shawn Buckley**

So I'm just going to stop you. So when you say your legs were swelling, they were swelling so much that you felt the need to go to the ER [Emergency Room].

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct. Just my left leg, though.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. So what happened at the ER?

**Joelle Valliere**

They examined. They determined that there wasn't a blood clot, and I was sent on my way.

**Shawn Buckley**

So in the following three to four weeks, what was your experience?

**Joelle Valliere**

I started to get quite tired, a lot of fatigue, loss of appetite, not sleeping well or sleeping too much. My feet began to swell a bit. And a lot of vomiting, for no reason that I was aware of.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you were still working at the time. So when you came home after a day's work, how were you doing?

**Joelle Valliere**

I was exhausted.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Now something happened on your birthday. Can you tell us about that?

**Joelle Valliere**

Yeah. My husband and I, every year we go golfing for my birthday. We finished a round a golf, and I recognized that my feet were getting a little tight in my shoes. But at the end of the round, I looked down

[00:05:00]

and my feet were swollen right over my shoes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Actually, swollen right over your shoes.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yeah.

**Shawn Buckley**

So what did you do?

**Joelle Valliere**

I sent him home to feed the kids and I went to the hospital.

**Shawn Buckley**

And was there a diagnosis this time?

**Joelle Valliere**

Dr. Van Der Merwe did some blood work and determined that my kidney function had dropped to 34 per cent.

**Shawn Buckley**

And now, that actually went down as time went on, right?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

So what was it down to by the end of July?

**Joelle Valliere**

Nine per cent.

**Shawn Buckley**

Nine per cent. And, what's the cutoff level where, in the medical system, you're typically slotted for a kidney transplant? At what level?

**Joelle Valliere**

Fifteen.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay.

David, if you can let me, I'm just going to take control over the screen. I'm just going to show you some photographs. And, now, I'm not going to get them all in order, but am I correct that this photo is just basically a photo of your feet when they're not swollen [Exhibit RE-3]? This is normal feet.

**Joelle Valliere**

So that was at the U of A [University of Alberta] after they had they had given me some diuretics and controlled my edema, at that point.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. Now, just going to move to the next picture. That's an example of your feet being swollen [Exhibit RE-3a].

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

And we've got a couple of pictures that we'll enter as part of the record. But basically, the point being is when you're saying your feet are swollen; this is actually a physical representation of the difference [Exhibits RE-3b, RE-3c].

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Thank you David. So what did the hospital do? You went to the hospital and they're finding that your kidney function is at 34 per cent. How did they treat that?

**Joelle Valliere**

So in Drayton Valley, what they were doing was trying to control my blood pressure. My blood pressure when I went on the first of June was 190 on 145. They couldn't believe that I had no chest pain, no headache, at that point. So just controlling my blood pressure was their main focus, but it was not successful.

**Shawn Buckley**

And literally a few days later, on June 4th, you had to go back to the ER. What was happening on June 4th? There was something with your hand.

**Joelle Valliere**

My left hand. I was driving the children to town. We live about 20 minutes east of town. So I was taking one to work and one to school. I noticed that my left hand began to tingle and I looked down. And from my wrist down, it was eggplant colour—a deep purple.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you ended up going to the University of Alberta. Can you tell us what happened?

**Joelle Valliere**

I was admitted to the Nephrology Unit after they couldn't determine exactly what was happening. But I was in emergency there, and then admitted to the Nephrology Unit.

**Shawn Buckley**

And what diagnosis did they give you?

**Joelle Valliere**

So I was admitted on the 4th of June, and on the 7th of June they did a kidney biopsy. And I was released on the 9th of June without a diagnosis at that time. On the 14th of June, the doctor of nephrology called me, and I was diagnosed with dense deposit disease.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, the day you were admitted, Dr. Courtney told you about other admissions. And can you speak to us about that?

**Joelle Valliere**

He said that aside from myself, four other people had been admitted—so five of us—, and four of us had just been vaccinated within the month.

**Shawn Buckley**

And, am I correct that he basically voiced that he was suspicious about the number of people being admitted that day?

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

And the connection to the vaccine.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

So now my understanding is that on June 24th you were started on immune-suppressant drugs?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

And were you given an explanation as to why?

**Joelle Valliere**

So what they told me was that the vaccine had likely put my immune system into overdrive. And in doing that, I developed an autoimmune disease. So by giving me immunosuppressant therapy was to stop my immune system—was to kill it—and hopefully stop the disease from progressing.

[00:10:00]

**Shawn Buckley**

And can you share with us going forward the types of things that you went through medically?

**Joelle Valliere**

I had eight surgeries and procedures in eight months. Aside from the medications, and in addition to the medications and the edema, I gained about 40 pounds, which I've lost now. I began hemodialysis on the 10th of August—emergency—because I couldn't walk or hardly breathe at that point. So it was an emergency to get me started before it got worse.

On the 27th of August 2021, they placed a peritoneal dialysis line. I had to let that heal for about six weeks before I could use it. And then, so I went from hemodialysis to peritoneal dialysis, which I could do at home.

On December 3rd of '21, I had my first hemodialysis line removed. December 8th of '21, my peritoneal dialysis line failed. December 9th, I had to have a second hemodialysis line placed.

Just infection after infection and it was, just— It was tough.

**Shawn Buckley**

And my understanding is that you were on dialysis for six months, but you were eventually able to get off dialysis.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

And I'm just going to show— You shared a picture. (So David if you could pull my screen up.) This is a picture you shared with us of you actually having a dialysis treatment [Exhibit RE-3d].

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

This would also be the time you described to us you'd put on a lot of weight.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

So just looking at you on the witness stand and this photo, I see the difference. (Thank you, David.) So if you were to— Well, I'm asking you now: What is your current condition now? So you're off dialysis, and you've been off dialysis for a while. What are you experiencing now?

**Joelle Valliere**

So I actually had blood work done yesterday, and my kidney function is at 21 EGFR [Estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate]. And my creatinine levels are in the 256 range.

**Shawn Buckley**

And what does that mean?

**Joelle Valliere**

So my EGFR is the measurement of your kidney function. So in a healthy person, it should be above 60. And mine's at 21, so it's kind of like a percentage of what your kidney function is at.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, and at 15 percent or below, you're eligible for kidney transplant.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Are there any other things, perhaps affecting your mind or your concentration?

**Joelle Valliere**

So with my creatinine levels being high, it does affect your mind, your brain function. I do forget a lot of words. Foggy. I'm very tired. I work a lot because that's what I love to do, but I suffer for it. I have severe insomnia. My appetite isn't great. I have to watch my diet and my fluid intake so that I don't end up with fluid retention. I'm on nine different medications at this time, which is a great improvement compared to the about 40 pills I was taking, in the beginning, a day.



**Shawn Buckley**

Now, I'm going to the transplant issue. So today you're at 21 per cent, and some days you're lower than that.

**Joelle Valliere**

It fluctuates.

**Shawn Buckley**

Yeah, and my understanding is that you're actually concerned about it going below 15 per cent because you may not be eligible for a transplant?

**Joelle Valliere**

That's right, because I don't have my second vaccine. Although I did receive documentation that, as of April 20th, I could be eligible, but I would have to have some education on what COVID might do to me.

**Shawn Buckley**

So in April of 2023. So until recently, you weren't eligible to be on the kidney transplant list because you had to be double vaxxed. Am I right about that?

**Joelle Valliere**

That is correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

So here you are. You can't get another shot because your kidneys are failing because of the first shot—and the doctors agree with you on this—but they were still expecting you to then get a second shot before you would be eligible for kidney transplant.

**Joelle Valliere**

That's correct.

[00:15:00]

**Shawn Buckley**

And now you could be eligible, but you need to be educated about the dangers of COVID, presumably to convince you to get your second shot.

**Joelle Valliere**

That's right.

**Shawn Buckley**

Have you submitted a claim for your injuries?

**Joelle Valliere**

I have submitted a claim with vaccine injury benefits with the federal Government of Canada.

**Shawn Buckley**

And how long ago did you do that?

**Joelle Valliere**

September of 2021.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay, so I imagine that's been totally processed and you're now receiving compensation?

**Joelle Valliere**

Absolutely not.

**Shawn Buckley**

Has anything happened?

**Joelle Valliere**

Nothing.

**Shawn Buckley**

And can you share with us what the complication might be?

**Joelle Valliere**

The complication might be that they're still trying to access documents from all the doctors that treated me since my injury.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay, and is there also a concern that you might have had a pre-existing condition that would basically disqualify you?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can you share that with us?

**Joelle Valliere**

When I was 16, I had a strep infection. And by the time I was 19, I had decreased kidney function because of that infection.

**Shawn Buckley**

Were you ever treated for that?

**Joelle Valliere**

I was given diuretics—so a water pill—and that’s all.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay, and that was for a short period of time.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

So since you were 18 until what you’ve just shared with us getting vaccinated in 2021, did you have any kidney issues at all?

**Joelle Valliere**

From the age of 19 to 2021, I had no kidney issues.

**Shawn Buckley**

And you had actually had your kidneys checked out in 2012 just out of curiosity.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can you share with us the results?

**Joelle Valliere**

I saw Dr. Kym here in Red Deer, actually—I was living in Sylvan Lake at the time. And he felt that I was likely misdiagnosed, because there is no way, in his opinion, that somebody with MPGN, membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis, could maintain perfect kidney function with no treatment at all.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, so that doctor who— And again, you just deliberately went in, you didn’t need to go in, but you were curious about your kidney function. And you’re basically told, “No, you never have had kidney function problems.”

**Joelle Valliere**

That's correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you were off work because of this from May 2021 to January 2022, so basically for seven months. Can you share with us the economic impact of being off work?

**Joelle Valliere**

So for myself personally, as a partner of the funeral home, I remained on payroll because I did not qualify for disability benefits. So they did keep me on payroll. But we did have to hire help as I was the only embalmer there. So we had to hire out help.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, so you're a co-owner of the business?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

And so basically, the economic impact is somebody had to basically replace you, and those wages had to be paid.

**Joelle Valliere**

That's right.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, how has this affected you emotionally, having gone through this experience?

**Joelle Valliere**

I don't even know where to start with that. There was a time where I considered medically assisted death, which I don't know why because as a Christian it's totally against everything I believe in. But I just couldn't do it anymore.

**Shawn Buckley**

So you were finding this so difficult that you were actually considering having your own life taken through the government program for assisted suicide.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

What types of thoughts were going through your mind when you were at that place?

**Joelle Valliere**

I was told that the only way off dialysis was kidney transplant or death, but kidney transplant wasn't an option—just all the infections. My kids— I just— It's just too much. I really, really enjoy the work that I do. I'm so privileged to be able to walk alongside families in their darkest times, and I couldn't do that. I had to fight to go back to work.

[00:20:00]

And even now, I don't have the strength that I had physically. It was just tough.

**Shawn Buckley**

And my understanding is that you even had a discussion with your husband about entering the MAID [Medical Assistance in Dying] program. And for people internationally, that's the government program for assisted suicide.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

So it had gotten to the point where you were discussing it with your husband.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you just spoke about really enjoying your work and being able to assist families that are experiencing a time of crisis. You've been an embalmer for 12 years.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

And you started in the funeral business earlier at 2008.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

To qualify as an embalmer you actually have to do 50— I don't know what you call it when you embalm somebody.

**Joelle Valliere**

So in the province of Alberta, I took a two-year program. And in order to become a licensed funeral director and embalmer, you have to put in, much like an apprenticeship, you have to put in your 18 hours of experience. But I also had to log 50 embalmings and 50 funeral arrangements with families.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, just to qualify before you started. Now, my understanding is once the vaccine rollout started, you worked till May of 2021. So you're roughly there for about the first five to six months of the vaccine rollout.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

And then you were off work for seven months, but you started back in January of 2022?

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Did you see changes when you were embalming people that you had not seen ever in your career before the vaccine rollout?

**Joelle Valliere**

I did. Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can you share those with us, please?

**Joelle Valliere**

I found that the drainage— So the blood that would drain was very thick and sludgy. I found that it was almost like a sandy texture in some cases. And then I have— Personally, I have experienced calamari-like—

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you use that term, and that's just what embalmers are now calling these new things that are being found?

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes. So in my experience, I had never seen that before.

**Shawn Buckley**

(And David, can you just pull up my computer?) So this is a photo that you provided [Exhibit number not available]. This is an example of one of those things you referred to as calamari.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

That you pulled out of a body when you were embalming.

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

And my understanding is basically these things are complicating the embalming process because it's harder to pump the embalming fluids into the body. These are plugging either the venous or arterial systems.

**Joelle Valliere**

That's correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

So does it take longer to do—to embalm a person now?

**Joelle Valliere**

So I'm finding it's taking longer. I'm finding that I'm having to build up pressure in order to release anything that might be causing restraint in the circulatory system.

**Shawn Buckley**

And more specifically, you mean these things that you're referring to as calamari.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Just so that we understand your evidence, so you are actually putting pressure inside the body to try and force these things to move so that they can be taken out—so that you can actually flush the body with the embalming fluid.

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

So it's a complication that you had never seen prior to the vaccine rollout.

**Joelle Valliere**

I had not experienced that myself, no.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, what happened when the vaccine boosters came out?

**Joelle Valliere**

Well, that's when I started to experience these.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay.

**Joelle Valliere**

Although, I was away from work for quite some time, so I don't know what was happening in that time, either.

[00:25:00]

**Shawn Buckley**

Thank you, Joelle. I don't have any further questions for you, but the commissioners may have some questions.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you very much for your touching testimony. So there's a lot of things to unfold in what you've been through. I was wondering about how the doctors and people that were treating you were trying to understand what happened to you. I've heard discussion about previous conditions from a strep infection that are known to induce autoimmune conditions. In your case your kidney was affected, but it had been resolved after the strep has been controlled, and you had no incident whatsoever after that.

**Joelle Valliere**

So when I was first diagnosed at 19, which was likely a misdiagnosis according to Dr. Jim, he told me that I would require a kidney transplant within 10 years, that I would never be able to have children. And I went on to be fine for 27 years without issues to my kidneys. No edema: nothing. I've had two babies, you know, without complication.

I just don't understand why all of a sudden— So it was actually Dr. Courtney who said— Because I didn't know— Like I thought maybe, okay, so they said 10 years. Maybe I was



lucky and it took 27. But it was Dr. Courtney that said it was likely from my immune system being— I do forget a lot of words because of my creatinine levels being high— So likely because my immune system being in overdrive, it is what caused this dense deposit disease.

We were concerned that— You know, there's literature that states that MPGN and dense deposit disease are the same thing, but that is not the case at all. When I was 19, it was an inflammation of the glomeruli. So they said that the inflammation kind of, I guess, turned my glomeruli inside out. I was keeping the toxins in, releasing all the good stuff. But this is entirely different. This is an entirely different disease, and it's very rare. I'm one in 1.6 million.

**Commissioner Massie**

Are you aware of any situation where you might have been infected by COVID before the vaccination, with symptoms or without any symptoms?

**Joelle Valliere**

I don't think so. I don't know.

**Commissioner Massie**

So it was your first encounter, if you want with them—

**Joelle Valliere**

Yes.

**Commissioner Massie**

You mentioned there was four people that seemed to have a similar condition about the same time. Do you know what happened with these people in terms of their further treatments?

**Joelle Valliere**

I don't know. So Dr. Courtney, when I saw him, he did let me know that four other people had been admitted. And he was suspicious of vaccine injury. He said— But I was by far, of all the patients he'd seen, the worst.

**Commissioner Massie**

Did anybody suggest to you to use some sort of treatment that are being currently developed in order to get rid of spike protein, in case this could have been still present in your system?

**Joelle Valliere**

Not on a medical level, no.

**Commissioner Massie**

Okay, thank you.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

Good morning and thank you for your testimony. I'm just wondering. You mentioned you have children. How are the children affected as you continue through this journey?

**Joelle Valliere**

It's been very difficult on them. I think one of my most memorable conversations with my son—I had a little bit of trouble with him and he was better at this point—and he came outside and he sat beside me and he was crying. I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "I'm just so sorry, mom." And I asked him, "Why?" He said, "I feel like I took a little bit of life out of you. Now, look." And I said, "That's okay. My purpose was to make sure that you're okay, then my job is done." So—

[00:30:00]

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

Thank you.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Good morning, and thank you for your testimony. I think you said in your testimony that, originally, you were not eligible to get a kidney transplant because you were not double vaccinated. Is that correct?

**Joelle Valliere**

Correct.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Were you eligible for the MAID program?

**Joelle Valliere**

I didn't look into it. It was just simply discussion.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

You also mentioned that you believe that in the compensation program that they're considering a pre-existing condition. And my question to you is, when you got the vaccine, did the doctors inform you that if you had a pre-existing condition, this could exasperate it?

**Joelle Valliere**

No.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Thank you very much.

**Joelle Valliere**

You're welcome.

**Shawn Buckley**

There being no further questions, Joelle, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we sincerely thank you for coming and testifying today.

**Joelle Valliere**

Thank you.

[00:31:32]



***Final Review and Approval:*** Anna Cairns, August 30, 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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