



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Red Deer, AB

Day 1

April 26, 2023

### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 11: Leah Cottam**

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[00:00:00]

**Shawn Buckley**

And our next witness is Leah Cottam. Leah, can I get you to state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name?

**Leah Cottam**

Okay my name is Leah Cottam. L-E-A-H C-O-T-T-A-M.

**Shawn Buckley**

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

**Leah Cottam**

I do.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, I think it's fair to describe you as a farmer/rancher. Would that be a fair description?

**Leah Cottam**

Yeah, I live out in the country. I have 22 cows. They're in the process of calving and 25 grass heifers that go out in the summer.

**Shawn Buckley**

And you help some of your neighbors with calving and you've been having a pretty busy week as I understand it.

**Leah Cottam**

Yes, actually it's my cousin and she has 276 cow calves.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. And then you also have a job where you work as an administrator, and you've been at that task for about five years.

**Leah Cottam**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you are vaccinated and my question to you is: What led you to the decision to get vaccinated with the COVID vaccine?

**Leah Cottam**

Okay. I've been looking after my aunt that is 84 years old. So with the pressure of everything, I watched the media. I watched COVID come across the country, jump across the pond. Everybody recommended that as soon as, in my age group—I'm 50 something plus—that I have the ability to go and get my vaccine. I got mine May 6th. So as soon as I was available that I could do it, I went and did it. I work for a company that over the year, it became mandatory to work for one of our contractors that you had to be vaccinated otherwise you could walk out the door.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, my understanding is that when you got your first shot you had no adverse reaction to it.

**Leah Cottam**

Correct. And then I got a second shot.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Tell us what happened.

**Leah Cottam**

Well, nothing really. My next one, July 6th. So nothing in 2021. Nothing happened to me that time either. My arm was a little sore but just like everybody else, I was fine.

**Shawn Buckley**

You were fine for about six months, and then what happened?

**Leah Cottam**

Then in November we had gone, we have some area just outside of Rocky Mountain House, and we were moving cows. So the cow and the calf go out to the pasture in the summer, and

then in the winter or in the fall, November, they get split between cows and calves. And then the calves go to market and the cows come home. So while we were working the whole day, which is basically normal, moving gates and everything like that, opening and closing. The next day my feet got sore. And then I could hardly walk and then— Can I just keep going?

**Shawn Buckley**

Yeah.

**Leah Cottam**

So this lasted for about a week. Then I went to a walk-in clinic in Red Deer, and the guy sent me for x-rays, the doctor, and told me that I had— I went back to visit him after the x-rays came back, and he said I had plantar fasciitis. And that there was basically nothing that you could do, footwear, and stuff to put support on your feet. And then, I don't know, it was in the balls of my feet, so it was at the front of my toes. When I did research, I just, plantar fasciitis really is on the heel of your— I'm not a doctor. I didn't know. I don't know. But it was very weird. So that was November. Can I just keep going?

**Shawn Buckley**

Yeah, no, no, I'll stop you if I want you to stop. I think you're getting to the lifting arms part.

**Leah Cottam**

Yeah, I am actually. So that's November and then my birthday is in December. I'm a Sagittarius.

[00:05:00]

I have to get a driver's license. So I need a physical every five years. I went to my family doctor, and I complained about my feet, still. And then, in the meantime, what had happened was I couldn't lift my arms, like this. Couldn't lift them up. I couldn't type. I couldn't type on my computer. I found it very troubling. Anyway, they did blood tests, came back, and said, "No there's nothing wrong with you." So this is in Calgary. I have a family doctor in Calgary.

Then I came back to Red Deer. And then come January, I start to swell up in my hands, and it moves from my left hand to my right hand to my feet. Inflammation all over my body. So I go to a walk-in clinic. They do more blood tests. I've got pages of blood tests. And they tell me that there's absolutely nothing wrong with me, nothing wrong with me. Then I go back to Calgary. I talked to my family doctor. Again, she says, "According to the bloodwork there's nothing wrong with you."

So I come back to Red Deer and finally my hands are so swollen I look like the Michelin Man. And I can't put my shoes— My feet in— I can't put my socks on. I can't put my shoes on.

**Shawn Buckley**

So your feet are so swollen you can't put your socks on.

**Leah Cottam**

Yeah, they didn't fit.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Go on.

**Leah Cottam**

Yeah. So anyway, I went to a lady, another walk-in clinic in Red Deer. She was an English walk-in nurse. She took my blood work and said she was going back to England, so come back next week or something like that. But then what happened is—now I'm in April of 2022. So now I'm laying in bed on Friday night, and I can't move because my chest hurts so much. So I didn't know what to do. And then I just got up, and I went into the emergency in Red Deer. And he, all of a sudden, looked at the blood work that came from the English lady, the walk-in doctor, and my inflammation was off the charts. So he immediately put me on pills—two pills for pain, one for stomach—and then gave me a recommendation to go see a rheumatologist the following Wednesday.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you went there because of chest pain. Was there any diagnosis concerning the chest pain?

**Leah Cottam**

No, he offered to give me a— Oh he did a chest x-ray. Yes, he did. And then offered for me to go to a CT [computed tomography] scan or something like that. In the follow-up, I have also had another— well I've had a CT scan and two other chest x-rays. So the result of the chest x-ray is that my lungs are filling up with fluid and—not filling up, but there's fluid in the bottom of my lungs—and it's because of the inflammation in my system. I have a specialist in Calgary that has been monitoring me since the start of all of this.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now prior to the vaccinations, is it fair to describe you as a healthy individual?

**Leah Cottam**

Yes. I thought I was.

**Shawn Buckley**

So can you give us kind of a contrast because I think some of the people don't understand just how disabled you were. Like my understanding is some days you couldn't turn the keys in your car, or you couldn't pull your pants up, or put a bra on, or hold a glass of milk. Can you share some of these things?

**Leah Cottam**

Exactly like that. It wasn't just that. It was from my socks to my knees, to my arms that I couldn't move or lift above my shoulders. My hands were so swollen. I lost all the strength in my body completely.

[00:10:00]

And not only that. I've been trying to lose— I'm 50 plus years old. I've been trying to lose weight my whole life. It's just not in my genetics. I was 175 pounds. I now weigh 145 pounds. And I don't know why or what it was. It just dropped. And then, if I looked at it afterwards, it was every muscle that I had, I didn't have anymore. So like turning— like opening the door or even closing the door in my car, I struggled with it. Putting my seatbelt on. I couldn't get my seatbelt on. But then I couldn't get it— I couldn't undo it to get it out. I struggled turning. And it's just turning the key. I didn't have the strength to turn the key. And then my feet were sore. So then it was very hard for me to walk. And I think I kind of got a little depressed, and I ended up just sleeping because I was in pain all the time. And I think I missed the whole summer of 2022.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, and how did you do mentally, going through this?

**Leah Cottam**

I got through. I was a single parent, so I always had to get up and get it done because there was nobody else to get it done. So I think I was depressed at: Why me? I'm sure everybody goes through that same kind of question. Why me? What's happening? What's wrong? What can I do? Why is this like this? Yeah, I resorted to sleep. I went to bed.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, my understanding is that you're doing better than you were. But you still are fairly weak. So things like opening gates are difficult, and even still doing stairs and things like that are different than before. But you are better than you were in the summer of 2022.

**Leah Cottam**

Yes, I'm getting better. To carry a bucket of barley is— Last year I couldn't do it. This year I can do it. So my strength is coming back. But my hands are still swollen. Yeah, I'm getting better. I've quit losing weight. That was a little scary thing. I've plateaued at 145. That was very scary. So they put me on another— I went from taking zero drugs to taking 12 pills a day. And now I'm giving myself injections once a week, two different drugs.

**Shawn Buckley**

So how many drugs are you on today?

**Leah Cottam**

I take two different injections. They put me on a biological drug and methotrexate. And I've kind of weaned myself away from the painkillers. So now I'm taking vitamins and one other prescribed pill.

**Shawn Buckley**

Thank you. I have no further questions for you. Perhaps the commissioners have some questions. And they do.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you very much for your testimony. I'm curious about the blood testing that you've been through over a long period of time that couldn't detect anything. And then you had another test done by another doctor, and now you could detect it. So is it that it became apparent all of a sudden? Or was it because it was not really well detected previously? What's the situation there? Because you had clearly inflammation, right?

**Leah Cottam**

I did, but they never tested for it. And no matter when I went back, it would come, and it would go. So it wasn't something that was a constant thing. Like it would show, my hands would swell up for like a day and a half and then it would go down and then it would come up over here and then it would go to my feet. Like it would roam my whole entire body. And then the reason why the last lady did it is because I was inflamed. So I don't know why the medical system, or any other doctor didn't do the proper test that they were supposed to do, or whether it was— I don't know.

[00:15:00]

**Commissioner Massie**

So it seems that you are suffering from some sort of chronic inflammation that is treated by a number of drugs. You mentioned a biological drug that you inject. I'm curious to know what kind of a biologics are you taking? Do you know?

**Leah Cottam**

It's called Amjevita.

**Commissioner Massie**

Okay, it's an anti-TNF [anti Tumour Necrosis Factor], is it?

**Leah Cottam**

Yeah, I'm not sure. It's supposed to help the body—

**Commissioner Massie**

Dampen the inflammation response.

**Leah Cottam**

Yes.

**Commissioner Massie**

With that you've been making progress and recovering?

**Leah Cottam**

Yes, that just started in February. It took a long time for me to get the proper medication to where I am in January of this year, because I can still have flare-ups. So I would go see the

rheumatologist, and I would get steroid injections. It basically kept me going every three months. And then I just— She wanted to see me back. And then I'd go back, and I'd get another shot, so I could move, and I could function.

**Commissioner Massie**

Was there any diagnostic to explain your loss of muscle strength? Is it related to the inflammation process or is it something different?

**Leah Cottam**

I think it's part of what they said rheumatism, rheumatoid arthritis. So and if they can catch it. I didn't really, I didn't really ask a lot of those kind of questions. I just know that if I take the drugs, I feel better. If I get a steroid shot, I feel better. I find that if I look on the internet, I can look at so many different— I can look at the pills that I'm taking and each one of them has a side effect that I don't want to know anything about. And then I get another one that has a side effect that I don't really want to know anything about. So even with the two or three pills that I'm taking, I'm still developing, I would call them liver spots. And then they go away. They show up, and then they disappear. But then I talk to the doctor about it and that's not a side effect.

**Commissioner Massie**

So I'm curious about the time lapse between your last injection and the appearance of the side effect, which is fairly long. It would certainly not register within the, what is it, four weeks in Alberta. So was there an acknowledgment that this is a potential cause of your inflammation? Or was no link established between the vaccine and your chronic inflammation.

**Leah Cottam**

No. I did bring it up to a couple of doctors. But as soon as I brought it up, the subject was changed.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you.

**Leah Cottam**

You're welcome.

**Shawn Buckley**

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

**Leah Cottam**

Thanks for having me.

[00:18:34]



**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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