



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Quebec, QC

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

(Translated from the French)

Witness 1: Carole Avoine

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[00:00:00]

Samuel Bachand

Hello, Samuel Bachand. I am acting as counsel for the Commission. Madame Avoine, if you could just say your name and spell it for us first, please.

Carole Avoine

My name is Carole Avoine, C-A-R-O-L-E A-V-O-I-N-E.

Samuel Bachand

I will swear you in. Do you take an oath to tell this Commission only the truth?

Carole Avoine

Yes.

Samuel Bachand

So you're here to tell us about your experience with the AstraZeneca vaccination.

Carole Avoine

Yes.

Samuel Bachand

And its consequences with respect to your diagnosis of Bell's palsy. So I would ask you to relate all of this to us in chronological order, quite calmly; and then, if necessary, I will stop you to ask for clarification.

Carole Avoine

Perfect. On April 22, 2021, I received a dose of AstraZeneca. On the twentieth day after my vaccine, I started feeling a pull in my ear. I felt it start to tug in my mouth. In any case, I went to bed since it was late at night. I went to bed thinking it was stress because I had just started a new job. I wasn't sure: "I'm going to go to sleep, maybe it will pass." The next morning when I woke up, half of my face was paralyzed. I went to the hospital. I saw an emergency doctor who confirmed that I had Bell's palsy. She pointed out to me that I had the same paralysis as Jean Chrétien and that, basically, I could cope. I could nevertheless have a good life because he had had a good career despite his condition. When I asked her for a note for my work because I had just started a new job, she told me she couldn't do anything for me because it was a possibility that I would stay like this my whole life. And then, that was that. And she told me that she was referring me to an ENT [ear, nose, and throat physician] and that I was to wait for news from the ENT.

Samuel Bachand

When was the intensity of the paralysis described or diagnosed, under what circumstances?

Carole Avoine

At that time, my paralysis was not yet at its "top" level. It was when I went to see the ENT a few days later, she was the one who told me that I had a grade six.

Samuel Bachand

What does that mean?

Carole Avoine

Well, with Bell's palsy, you've got seven grades, I was a grade six. Grade seven is when your face sags. Fortunately, I didn't have a sagging face. That's the only criteria I didn't get for Bell's palsy. To confirm my grade six paralysis, I had to have an electromyogram, for which the doctor puts little needles in your face and administers electric shocks to see if a current runs through your face, through your nerves. And I had nothing going on. Nothing was moving. It was then that they told me my recovery would be long and that I would be left with sequelae.

Samuel Bachand

I want to come back to your first consultation with the emergency doctor. Can you just elaborate a bit on what she told you about the permanence or impermanence of the problem?

Carole Avoine

She basically didn't tell me anything about it. I asked her if there was a link to the vaccine that I had received. I took out my paper to show her that I had received a dose of vaccine.

Samuel Bachand

Which vaccine?

Carole Avoine

AstraZeneca.

Samuel Bachand

Against?

Carole Avoine

COVID. All she did was wave her hand, "No, that's not it, there's no connection to that." And she never took my paper, she never wrote in my medical file. And she sent me home.

Samuel Bachand

Did you ask her, or did she otherwise tell you why she felt there was no connection between your paralysis and the vaccine you received? We're looking at you receiving it approximately two weeks prior?

Carole Avoine

Twenty days. No, no. No reason. When I met the ENT again, I again asked if there was a link, a possible link. She replied that all flu shots can cause Bell's palsy but that wasn't the case for me, for no other reason than that.

[00:05:00]

Samuel Bachand

Did you check with the ENT to find out why she felt there was no link between your AstraZeneca COVID vaccine and your paralysis?

Carole Avoine

Yes, I asked her but I never got an answer, other than her saying that in my case, it wasn't that. So basically, the only answer she gave me was that I was better off with this than with COVID.

Samuel Bachand

Can you describe any other symptoms that you have endured or experienced as a result of your COVID vaccination?

Carole Avoine

I lost hearing in my left ear. It took seven months before I managed to close my left eye. Of course everything else, with my mouth and all that. When you have paralysis, you have no more strength in the corner of your mouth. That was definitely part of my symptoms.

Samuel Bachand

From the preliminary documents that I received from you, it seems there were also apparent impacts, or in any case, somewhat unexpected endocrinal or hormonal phenomena, if you could tell us about them?

Carole Avoine

Yes. I had my dose in April—on April 22. Then in June, I had my period for two weeks despite the fact that I had been postmenopausal for seven years. I had no periods for seven years, then I had two weeks with heavy bleeding.

Samuel Bachand

Were there any medication changes, related to your hormonal status at that time?

Carole Avoine

The only medicine I took was hormones for the hot flashes, so that's the only medicine I took. I didn't take any other medicine.

Samuel Bachand

Okay, so how long have you been taking it?

Carole Avoine

Since 2015.

Samuel Bachand

Okay, in April, May, June, what modification did you make to your intake of this medication?

Carole Avoine

I had no changes. The only change I had in my medication intake was the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Samuel Bachand

Have you expressed the desire—and if so, how—to file a claim with the compensation plan for vaccinated persons in Quebec, the public plan?

Carole Avoine

I tried to file a claim myself.

Samuel Bachand

How?

Carole Avoine

By the internet. But it was impossible to do so because it took a signature from a doctor who linked the vaccine to my paralysis.

Samuel Bachand

When you saw that, did you go back to see a doctor to ask for such a document or such a declaration?

Carole Avoine

I met another ENT. He also told me that he wouldn't fill in the forms, that he didn't make declarations, that, basically, there was no connection.

Samuel Bachand

Did he give you a reason other than that for not filing a return?

Carole Avoine

No.

Samuel Bachand

Okay.

Carole Avoine

After my first appointment with the ENT, when I saw that no one wanted to report my side effect, I went online and filled in a statement myself, submitting directly to AstraZeneca. They sent a form to my ENT but I don't know if she filled out the form and then returned it because it needs my vaccine batch. But I had nothing in my file that said I had had a vaccine, which meant that she didn't have the information for it.

Samuel Bachand

Give us a bit more background on this voluntary statement you made to AstraZeneca. How was it done in practice?

Carole Avoine

Well, I went online and said I had Bell's palsy after I got a shot. And then they sent the form directly on the internet.

Samuel Bachand

On the internet, where was it on the internet? The internet is vast.

Carole Avoine

Well, it was on the AstraZeneca site.

Samuel Bachand

So what did it look like, in terms of the form, other than what you told us?

Carole Avoine

I couldn't tell you; I haven't seen the form. The only thing I know is that my doctor received the form.

Samuel Bachand

How do you know?

Carole Avoine

She was the one who told me about it because she had an obligation to fill it out since it came from AstraZeneca. Then she told me that she had received the form because it needed my vaccine batch. Since it wasn't in my file, she didn't know anything about my vaccine. So she wanted to have my sheet which described my vaccine.

Samuel Bachand

Are we talking about the first ENT in the timeline?

Carole Avoine

Yes. Basically, I saw just one. I saw the other ENT only once because I needed a follow-up for a neurologist, since today with my sequelae, I have lots of spasms that cause speech problems. So basically, the only treatment I can receive is Botox injections that I may have to receive until the end of my days.

[00:10:00]

Samuel Bachand

What kind of access to your medical records have you requested from the various specialists mentioned?

Carole Avoine

Currently, I have not yet requested my medical records. This is my next step because I want to have my side effects acknowledged.

Samuel Bachand

If the commissioners have any other questions, I invite them to ask.

Commissioner Massie

Good morning, Madame Avoine.

Carole Avoine

Hello.

Commissioner Massie

I have a question concerning the difficulties you encountered in having your adverse effects recognized. What do you think the possibility is of meeting enough doctors until you find one who might be more receptive? Is it difficult to get these appointments?

Carole Avoine

It's super difficult. To date, I have one doctor who offered me his help, and this just happened very recently. I've been looking for a doctor who is willing to help me for two years.

Commissioner Massie

And for the escalation of your adverse effects, you absolutely need to have a doctor's signature. And here, you have indeed succeeded in taking this step.

Carole Avoine

Yes.

Commissioner Massie

What follow-up are you expecting? Are you waiting for recognition by the health authorities or is it not necessarily automatic?

Carole Avoine

I would appreciate recognition because I am one of those who have succeeded, according to Mr. Dubé. When it happened, the lottery of the 400-some thousand who were entitled to a dose of AstraZeneca, which was available in April—there were 400-some thousand doses. According to the government, I won the lottery because I managed to get an appointment for that dose.

Commissioner Massie

Following this unfortunate incident, did you immediately make the decision that there's no question of you taking other doses?

Carole Avoine

Well, at the time, I was asking myself that question. I asked my ENT if it was safe to take the second dose. What she told me was that basically the second dose would be safer because I wouldn't be getting the same vaccine. I would get Pfizer which, according to her, would be safer. Following my first appointment with the emergency doctor, I filed a complaint with the CIUSSS [Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux/integrated university health and social services centre] of the hospital that I went to, because I didn't exactly understand the service that I had gotten. And then I received a Letter of Finding about my complaint from the CIUSSS, and the person who wrote to me referred me to public health for my second dose.

So from there, I was like, "As for my second dose, Public Health doesn't have any of my medical records." As I had no answers to my questions, I made the decision that I wanted

no more doses. I was done. I didn't wait for the doctor's approval. I told myself, no, I was not taking the next dose.

Commissioner Massie

Do you know of other people around you who have had the same type of side effects as yours?

Carole Avoine

No. Yes, I know one, excuse me. I know one at my work who had it, but she recovered. She wasn't left with sequelae.

Commissioner Massie

And so, what is the current prognosis for your recovery from your sequelae?

[00:15:00]

Carole Avoine

Today, I received confirmation that I would have to live with a grade three, that I had no possibility of it improving. It's been two years today that I've been paralyzed. Yeah, it's been confirmed that I would have to live with a grade three. A grade three means that I have to tape my eye shut to sleep every night—because when I close my eye, I get so many cramps that it becomes difficult the next day. The only way I'm able to drink is from a bottle. A glass is also very difficult. Often, I will have to drink with a straw. When I go outside, if it is sunny, my eye waters all the time. Every time I eat, my eye waters all the time. It's all part of my sequelae, which I have to learn to live with. Eating at a restaurant is over. I can no longer go to a restaurant because, when I eat—since I have no more strength on that side—I either drool or my food can come out of my mouth. So that's it.

Commissioner Massie

I'm also curious to know, did the dysregulation of your cycle finally recover?

Carole Avoine

Yes.

Commissioner Massie

So it was a relatively short episode?

Carole Avoine

Two weeks, yes.

Commissioner Massie

Very well. You have any questions?

Commissioner Massie

Thank you very much.

Carole Avoine

Thank you.

[00:21:48]

Final Review and Approval: Erin Thiessen, November 6, 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, and further translated from the original French.

For further information on the transcription process, method, and team, see the NCI website: <https://nationalcitizensinquiry.ca/about-these-translations/>



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