



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 1

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EVIDENCE

Witness 8: Richard Lizotte

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Welcome, Richard. And I'll ask if you can speak very loudly, because you're sounding quiet.

Richard Lizotte

Okay, how about now?

Shawn Buckley

That's a little better. And I'll ask if you would be kind enough to give us your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name.

Richard Lizotte

Sure. My full name is Richard Lizotte, R-I-C-H-A-R-D, L-I-Z-O-T-T-E.

Shawn Buckley

And Mr. Lizotte, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Richard Lizotte

In the name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I affirm to tell the truth.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you. Now you worked for your whole career as a paramedic, and now you're retired.

Richard Lizotte

That's true.

Shawn Buckley

And you're here to tell us the story about your older brother, Jerry.

Richard Lizotte

That's true.

Shawn Buckley

Can you tell us about Jerry, and we'll just maybe back up to when COVID started, hit in March of 2020?

Richard Lizotte

Sure. I can tell you a brief history of his health prior to his vaccinations. He was 85 years old and very vibrant. In fact, you'd never guess he was 85. He exercised every day. He had a stationary bike in his living room. He watched sports while he did that—45 minutes every day. He went to the coffee shop 5 days minimum, 5 days a week, sometimes 6 and 7. He met all his peers, his coffee buddies, there and they chit-chatted. He was heavy into bluegrass music, loved sports, and he lived a pretty vibrant life.

Shawn Buckley

Was he on any medications?

Richard Lizotte

He was briefly on blood pressure medication in 2017, and then his blood pressure was under control mostly through exercise and diet. And no, he was on no medication.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so when COVID hit, he's not on any medications. Is he seeing his doctor for any reason at that time?

Richard Lizotte

No. In fact, he didn't like going to see doctors. So you can probably count the number of medications that man had on your two hands in his entire life.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so what happened as COVID went on?

Richard Lizotte

Well, his first vaccine was on February the 27th of 2021. And very shortly after that vaccine, he lost his taste, which was something very critical to him because he loved to eat. And he lost his taste and his smell as well. He never really talked about his smell so much,

but his taste of course—that was very important to him. All his coffee buddies and himself, I think they went to every restaurant in Chatham, Ridgetown, Blenheim, Wallaceburg. They ate out a lot, plus he loved my wife’s home cooking, so the taste thing was a real concern for him. That was the biggest change after the vaccine, number one.

Shawn Buckley

And how significant was that—the change? Like, I think you gave an example of salt and sugar.

Richard Lizotte

Yeah, we tested him. This was probably a few months after his vaccine. We tested him and he could not tell the difference between salt and sugar. So that affirmed to us he was really accurate in not being able to taste.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, and what happened with the second shot? And I’ll just ask, do you recall what brand of vaccine it was?

Richard Lizotte

Yes, it was Pfizer.

Shawn Buckley

And were all the shots Pfizer?

Richard Lizotte

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

So what happened with the second shot? Do you recall when that was?

Richard Lizotte

Yes. Vaccine number two was June 16th of 2021. And shortly after getting that, we noticed—and it was a slow progression, but definitely a progression—his cognitive functions started being affected. His memory wasn’t as good. He showed a little more disinterest in things.

Shawn Buckley

Now, can I just stop you about his memory? When you say a slow progression, are we measuring in months? Are we measuring in weeks?

Richard Lizotte

I would say, after his shot, we probably noticed it about a month later. His first sign of some cognitive function delay, and then it just progressively got worse.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. And so describe that, give us some details about that.

Richard Lizotte

Well, he was always pretty sharp when it came to sports and remembering records and statistics and stuff like that. He began just not remembering those things. And events even in our own family life, he just started not remembering those things. And, yeah.

[00:05:00]

That was a big thing for him. And even his bluegrass music, which was his entire life, he just started not remembering the bluegrass festivals and concerts that he went to in Kentucky and Tennessee and all through southwestern Ontario.

And like I said, this was a progressive thing. We noticed it about a month into his second vaccine, and then it just continually got a little worse as time went by.

Shawn Buckley

Did anything happen to his appetite?

Richard Lizotte

Well, of course. When he couldn't taste anything. I remember we used to have him over quite often for supper, and he used to always comment on my wife's cooking. He didn't comment anymore, because he couldn't taste his stuff. And he stopped going to restaurants because he's "Why would I spend money?" He says, "Everything tastes the same anyways." So right away, his socialization started dropping right then and there; going to restaurants less and even started going to the coffee shop less, which was a real indication to us that something's not right.

Shawn Buckley

What about his mental state, his mental health?

Richard Lizotte

His mental health, he was so fear-mongered by COVID, that was the thing that— He was so fear-mongered that that became his whole life. I know he and a lot of his peers, they practically locked themselves in their homes and apartments, ordering food out, they were so fearful of this. And my brother slowly stopped watching as much sports and concentrated more on CNN, CBC, CTV, and just COVID-related. And, he became so fixated on that— And you know, constantly washing his hands. And he just wore a mask even to leave his apartment to go down the hall to put his garbage away; he'd put his mask on, nobody around. So he was really fearful of COVID.

Shawn Buckley

Now, do you remember when he had his third shot?

Richard Lizotte

Yes, his third shot was December 1st of 2021.

Shawn Buckley

And what happened after that?

Richard Lizotte

There was a sharp decline in his health after that. We noticed that his legs started swelling. Total apathy, he was energy-less. He had abdominal discomfort. His abdomen actually became distended. We kept telling him he should see the doctor, but he didn't want to see the doctor. But it got so bad that he agreed to go. I took him on December 21st to see his family doctor.

Shawn Buckley

What about his colour?

Richard Lizotte

His colour was very pale—very pale. And he had lost weight prior to the distended stomach, because you couldn't tell he'd lost weight when the stomach was distended. But prior to that, he started losing weight. That occurred before the third vaccine; he actually started losing weight. And then after the third, he was so pale, it was really quite awful. And then of course, he started having swelling in his legs and his distended stomach.

Shawn Buckley

So you took him to a doctor?

Richard Lizotte

His family doctor, yes.

Shawn Buckley

And what happened?

Richard Lizotte

Well, I regret this. I went to all his appointments for the last years, even his orthopaedic surgeon—he had a knee surgery in 2016. I went to all of them. This particular one, I did not go in. I was having some little problems myself with shortness of breath. They insisted I wear a mask. I wasn't wearing a mask. I told my brother, "You're going to be okay to go in by yourself?" And he said, "Sure." And he wasn't looking very good then. So he went and he came back after the appointment. And the doctor had given him an over-the-counter medication for cramps, because he was complaining of cramps, for his stomach. And he told me, "He said I'm good to go. He said, 'I'll see you in a year.'"

Now, I think he probably misunderstood the doctor, because this was December. I think the doctor probably meant I'll see you in the New Year. But he took it as I'll see you in a year.

And he was so disappointed, he said, “That’s it. I’m not seeing this guy anymore.” So that’s what happened there.

[00:10:00]

Shawn Buckley

What happened after the doctor’s office? What did you observe with your brother’s condition?

Richard Lizotte

Well, man—he started declining really quickly. And he didn’t want to see his family doctor. He didn’t want to go to the hospital. I thought to myself— “Listen, you saw a cardiologist a number of years ago for a brief period of hypertension.” And he saw him once a year, just as a checkup, and it was all flying colours, no problem. I says, “What if I call him up and I kind of make it—it wasn’t a fib, but—kind of try to make it look like it was a heart problem with the swelling of the legs.” I kind of suggested maybe CHF, congestive heart failure. So as soon as I mentioned that, the secretary says, “Yeah, you better bring him in.”

Shawn Buckley

And I’m just going to back you up because you said he continued to decline. Can you give us some specifics perhaps about his belly and his legs, for example?

Richard Lizotte

Yeah, for sure. His legs kept swelling. His distended stomach kept increasing. Severe constipation. He had almost zero appetite, he forced himself to eat. In fact, we almost forced him to eat something. And more pale: he became a little bit more diaphoretic and sweating.

Shawn Buckley

Can you tell me about the fluid in his legs and what was happening there?

Richard Lizotte

Well, it was just a build-up of fluid. There was just a build-up of fluid. And prior to us taking him to the cardiologist, there was even some weeping. We noticed in his bed there was some wetness, and we thought he had voided himself, urinated, and he said, “No, no, no, I’m fine.” He was dry there. We noticed that there was some weeping from the skin of his legs.

So that was really triggering us that he didn’t want to see his family doctor, so let’s see if we can see the cardiologist, and maybe through him, we can get a little bit better result.

Shawn Buckley

What happened at the cardiologist?

Richard Lizotte

Well, we brought him to the cardiologist. And unfortunately, he didn’t show up that day—for whatever reason, he probably had a legitimate reason—and we saw a nursing

practitioner and she was very good. She took one look at my brother and said, “Oh, he’s in big trouble.” She ordered some Lasix right away—fluid pill, 80 milligrams a day—and she ordered an ultrasound of the abdomen and an x-ray. And she said, “Yeah, your brother is in deep trouble.” So we couldn’t get it done the next day; the second day is when we took him in. It was a Friday, I remember that. And we took him in to get the x-ray and the ultrasound, and that took a whole day to get that done.

We brought him home; we fed him supper. He lives in Chatham. We came back home to Wallaceburg and by the time we got home, there was a message from the cardiologist—not from the nursing practitioner but from the cardiologist, who had seen the report. And he said, “I’ve got to see your brother right away. I have him in for Monday morning.” So then we brought him in Monday morning and actually saw the cardiologist.

Do you want to know what happened then?

Shawn Buckley

Yeah, and you can take your time. I appreciate this is difficult.

Richard Lizotte

Okay, no problem. On that Monday morning, we brought him in. It was January the 17th and the cardiologist was quite shocked because he hadn’t seen him for a while, how bad he really was. By that time, we had brought in a wheeled walker. And so he brought that in. The doctor told him he had multiple lesions on the liver, and probably some kidney involvement. So my brother then asked him, “Is it cancer?” And the doctor kind of hesitated, kind of shrugged his shoulders a bit and says, “Well, kind of.” My brother took that as he’s got cancer. I remember him telling the cardiologist, “It happened so fast.”

And the cardiologist then said to us, “I really shouldn’t be involved in this. I’m a cardiologist. I shouldn’t be really doing this.” “Perhaps this would be better done through your family doctor.”

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“However,” he says, “I’ve seen Jerry for a number of years, and I just can’t believe the change in him.” He says, “I’ll order some home care for him. In the meantime, I will try and contact a colleague of mine in London, who’s a specialist. It might take me a while to get a hold of him, and I’ll let you know how I make out.”

So we left. We brought him home. The very next day, home care called. And they said, “We’ll send someone to assess you on February the 10th,” which was 23 days after the doctor had asked for home care. We knew that he’s probably not even going to make it to February 10th, which he didn’t. He passed away February 4th.

My wife and I took sole responsibility for his home care, where we looked after him food-wise and personal hygiene-wise. We got to the point where we couldn’t even manage him. He still didn’t want to go to the hospital. He still didn’t want to see his family doctor. My wife was looking after him in the bathroom, and I thought, “Well, let’s try something.” I called his family doctor up, and the Lord was really good because I actually got to talk to him. And I said to the doctor, “Would you mind talking to my brother, because he’s not listening to us.” So we brought the phone in the bathroom and he talked to the doctor. And the doctor said, “Jerry,” he says, “I want you to go to emerge.” And he says, “We’ll make

arrangements and we'll have you admitted." So that was enough to convince my brother to go.

We had to call an ambulance for him. And we brought him to emerge. And I was in emerge. with him for eight to nine hours and they did all kinds of tests. And they kept saying they were going to admit him but they didn't. And finally, it was approaching midnight and they said, "Well, you may as well go home. When we get a room for him, we'll let you know."

The next morning—it was mid-morning, probably 10-ish—we called and he was still in emerge. And they hadn't found a room for him yet. They said, "As soon as we get a room, we'll call you." Well, by mid-afternoon, there was still no call. So we phoned emerge. and that's when they said oh yeah, they'd found a room for him up on the fourth floor. And I said, "Okay, I'll be up to see him." And that's when they told me, "No, you can't." I says, "What do you mean I can't?" And they said, "Well, it's COVID protocol for this hospital."

Shawn Buckley

Had you not had you not been with him in emergency just for like eight, nine hours?

Richard Lizotte

That's right. That's right, I was. So when they told me that, I really couldn't believe what I was hearing. They said "No, it's our hospital COVID protocol." I said, "Is it because I'm not vaccinated?" "No, no, no, nothing to do with that," they said: "Vaccinated, unvaccinated, nobody's coming into the hospital." I said, "Well, is there a way I can talk to him?" And they said, "Oh yeah, we can try to arrange that."

But that day was far spent. It was the next day that we talked to the staff. And the staff, the first thing they said to us was, "Your brother's giving us a hard time." First of all, that's never been his nature. Now, I know he's very personal and perhaps he didn't like the fact that somebody was giving him a bed bath or whatever. But they said, "He's giving us a hard time." And that's when I said, "Well, my wife and I are healthcare professionals." I said, "Let us come in and we'll gown up, we'll mask, we'll do whatever we have to do. And we can settle him down and give you a hand." "No—protocol for the hospital is you cannot come into the hospital." So I said, "Well, I'm going to have to talk to the administrator." And I tried to call the administrator, but they referred me to a patient liaison person. And she was very nice, very kind, very polite, but she in no uncertain terms said, "I'm sorry. You cannot come in to see your brother." And hey said, "Well, maybe we can connect with Skype." And every time we tried to do the Skype it never worked.

Then we tried talking to him on the phone. And by that time, he had declined so much he couldn't hear us. He was only giving me one-word answers to any of my questions. We tried to tell him that we're working behind the scenes so that we could go and be with him.

[00:20:00]

And it went on like that for seven days, until we got a phone call on the 31st saying that they had moved him to palliative care and that we could come up to see him. But we would both, my wife and I both, have to have a COVID test—a negative test.

The very next day, I went to get my COVID test. My wife couldn't get hers before the day after. As soon as I had a negative test, I went up to see him. I was quite shocked that he was completely unresponsive. And he never spoke another syllable till his death. For the next

two or three days, my wife and I spent all our time there. We prayed with him, we read scripture to him. We sang hymns to him. We knew that hearing was one of the last senses to go. We don't know what he was able to take in, but we never heard another word from him. I was both his power of attorney for health and the executor of his will. I wanted to know if there was any last wishes. We never got to do that.

Shawn Buckley

Mr. Lizotte, we thank you for sharing that story, and I'll just ask if the commissioners have any questions of you. And there are no questions. Is there any last thing that you'd like to share with us?

Richard Lizotte

Yes, I can tell you as a paramedic, and my wife's an RN, an emerge. nurse, both retired now: There is never a reason for a family member not to be with a dying family member. None. Zero. There's isolation attire that could be used. There's never a reason for this. Ever. I've dealt with infectious patients throughout my career: TB patients, HIV, AIDS patients, bacterial and viral meningitis, MRSA [Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus]. There is never a reason why somebody who is properly attired in isolation attire, they can't be with their dying loved one. Never. Never.

So this was beyond all comprehension for me. I could not understand this at all. If they would have asked me to wear a hazmat suit to be with my brother, I would have worn one. Whatever it takes. To me, this is next to criminal. And if something like this ever happens again, something has to be done.

My brother never saw a familiar face for eight days until he became unresponsive. That's all.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you. On behalf of the Citizens Inquiry, I'd like to thank you for sharing your testimony. And I'm sorry that it was difficult, but we definitely appreciate you sharing your brother's story.

Richard Lizotte

Thank you.

[00:23:50]

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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