



Troubling videos show Ashley Smith tranquilized against her will



Ashley Smith is shown surrounded by guard in this image made from video at Joliette Institution in Joliette, Que., on July 26, 2007. (Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario / THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO)

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Surveillance videos made public for the first time Wednesday at a coroner's inquest into the prison death of Ashley Smith show the young woman being tranquilized by guards against her will.

The videos cover several months leading up to Smith's death in October 2007. The 19-year-old choked herself in her cell at the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ont.

Julian Falconer, a lawyer for the Smith family, played the videos at the inquest Wednesday.

In a video clip from Montreal's Joliette Institution from three months before she died, guards in riot gear stand around Smith as a nurse injects her with a tranquilizer. Smith is strapped to a gurney.

"Tell her she has no choice," a nurse tells the guards.

Falconer told the inquiry that a psychiatrist prescribed the injections over the phone, based on information provided by a nurse.

He said Smith was given "chemical restraints" five times in seven hours.

In the video, Smith is also told: “You’re strapped in for your own security.”

“I didn’t even do anything to myself today,” she says.

The nurse at one point warns Smith that she will give her another injection “if you’re not calm in the next five minutes.”

Falconer is calling for both the psychiatrist and the nurse to testify at the inquiry.

Another video was taken in April 2007 as Smith was being transferred from a prison in Saskatoon.

Smith can be seen with a hood over her head as guards duct-tape her arms to the arm rests. She tells the guards that they are hurting her.

“Don’t bite me,” the pilot says.

“I’m not,” Smith replies.

“It’ll get worse if you do,” the pilot says.

“How can it get worse?” Smith asks.

“I’ll duct-tape your face,” the pilot says.

A female guard warns Smith that the pilot is “serious.”

“Oh,” Smith says.

Falconer told the inquiry that the video is evidence of how Correctional Service Canada “does business in transferring a victim.”

Smith was transferred 17 times between nine different prisons in five provinces.

She spent her last year in solitary confinement, where she received little treatment for her mental illness. Guards looked on as she killed herself following years of self-harm.

The surveillance videos were shown Wednesday after CSC lost its battle to keep them out of the inquiry. The agency argues that it is outside the scope of the inquiry to be looking at operations within the federal prison system.

Presiding coroner Dr. John Carlisle aims to examine the effect long periods of segregation and the repeated transfers had on Smith's mental state. He also wants to probe how Smith was treated in the months leading up to her death.

Three Ontario doctors have joined CSC in arguing that Carlisle has stretched the inquiry outside its mandate.

"This has become an investigation into how CSC treated Ms. Smith, and not an investigation into her death," said CSC lawyer Nancy Noble.

Noble argued that Carlisle would turn the inquest into a probe of "operations and management of CSC."

Noble also argued that examining mental health care would infringe on other provinces' jurisdiction.

Mark Freiman argued on behalf of the three doctors that provincial inquiries cannot examine federal services or agencies.

With files from The Canadian Press