



Coroner rejects bid for inquest to see Ashley Smith prison tapes

Postmedia News. March 28, 2011

TORONTO - Ontario's deputy chief coroner has dismissed motions that argued surveillance tapes from a Quebec prison showing inmate Ashley Smith being heavily medicated against her will and physically restrained months before she died should be included in the inquest into the 19-year-old's death.

Dr. Bonita Porter's ruling was released Monday morning.

Smith, 19, fatally strangled herself at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ont., on Oct. 19, 2007.

Last month, lawyers for the Ontario deputy chief coroner said in submissions that they do not see the "probative value" of the videos, which were recorded over a three-day period at the Joliette Institution north of Montreal in July 2007.

Smith's family and others had argued the videos must be included to show her state of mind at the time of her death, which has still not been determined as an accident or a suicide.

It is expected that more than 100 witnesses will testify during the proceedings, which are aimed at examining how to prevent similar deaths in the future.

The inquest was originally supposed to look at the 13-week period Smith spent in Ontario prisons before she died. But the scope was expanded to include the 11 months the young woman spent in federal custody.

During this time, Smith was transferred 17 times to prisons across the country due to her bad behaviour, staff fatigue and overcrowding.

A report has suggested that Smith's death may not have been a suicide, but an accident.

Smith had been incarcerated since the age of 15, when she was sent to prison for throwing apples at a postal worker in her hometown of Moncton, N.B. Her continued imprisonment was the result of racking up multiple charges while incarcerated.

The inquest will begin on April 4.