

## **Ashley Smith inquest set to start in April, could last until 2012**



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A coroner's inquest into the case of a young woman who choked herself to death in prison is set to start April 4 and could last into 2012.

Ashley Smith, 19, choked herself with a strip of cloth at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ont, in October 2007.

Lawyers for 10 of the parties involved in the inquest met today to adjourn the start date, originally set for January, to April.

Family lawyer Julian Falconer says one of the reasons he wanted the adjournment is because Smith's mother recently had a quadruple bypass and needs time to recover before travelling from New Brunswick to attend the inquest.

Deputy chief coroner Dr. Bonita Porter says the inquest will break for the summer in July and August and resume in the fall.

Various lawyers suggested the inquest would last at least six months and up to nine, but Falconer said it may take up to a year.

The inquest was originally expected to last three months, but the scope of the inquest was broadened in November.

When first announced, the inquest was limited to looking at the last 13 weeks of Smith's life — the time she was in Ontario prisons.

Her family had urged the presiding coroner to expand it to all 11 months Smith spent in federal custody, saying that would provide an accurate picture of the mental trauma that led to her death.

Those 11 months included 17 transfers between prisons and other facilities across the country, and the constant movement meant the mentally ill woman never got the chance to be properly treated, the family alleges.

In the ruling, Porter agreed the inquest could reach even further back through Smith's life, to examine “factors that may have impacted Ms. Smith's state of mind” on the day she died, not necessarily restricted by “age, geography, date or nature of the institution that was tasked with her care.”