



VERDICT AT CORONERS INQUEST

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE CORONER'S INQUEST PURSUANT TO
SECTION 38 OF THE CORONERS ACT, [SBC 2007] c 15, INTO THE DEATH OF

Lemaitre

SURNAME

Pierre Jean Dabe

GIVEN NAMES

An Inquest was held at The Burnaby Coroners Court, in the municipality of Burnaby

in the Province of British Columbia, on the following dates: November 26, 27, 28 29, 2018

before: **Vincent Stancato**, Presiding Coroner.

into the death of Lemaitre Pierre Jean Dabe 55 ☒ Male ☐ Female
(Last Name) (First Name) (Middle Name) (Age)

The following findings were made:

Date and Time of Death: July 29, 2013 10:42am
(Date) (time)

Place of Death: Abbotsford British Columbia
(Location) (Municipality/Province)

Medical Cause of Death:

(1) Immediate Cause of Death: a) Asphyxia
Due to or as a consequence of

Antecedent Cause if any: b) Ligature hanging
Due to or as a consequence of

Giving rise to the immediate cause (a) above, stating underlying cause last. c)

(2) Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death:

Classification of Death: ☐ Accidental ☐ Homicide ☐ Natural ☒ Suicide ☐ Undetermined

The above verdict certified by the Jury on the 29 day of November AD, 2018

Vincent Stancato
Presiding Coroner's Printed Name


Presiding Coroner's Signature



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PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE INQUEST:

Presiding Coroner: Vincent M. Stancato

Inquest Counsel: John Orr, QC

Court Reporting/Recording Agency: Verbatim Recording Services

Participants/Counsel: Mr. Mark Skorah and Ms. Mimi Willcock, counsel for BC Emergency Health Services.

The Sheriff took charge of the jury and recorded 6 exhibits. 15 witnesses were duly sworn and testified.

PRESIDING CORONER'S COMMENTS:*The following is a brief summary of the circumstances of the death as set out in the evidence presented to the jury at the inquest. This is to assist in understanding, but does not replace, the jury verdict and recommendations. This summary is not evidence.*

Pierre Jean Dabe Lemaitre was a 22 year veteran of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In the course of his career he served in various locations throughout British Columbia and, on two occasions, he was posted with the RCMP's E-Division Headquarters as its media relations liaison and spokesperson. At the time of his death, Mr. Lemaitre held the rank of Sergeant and was on medical leave from his position with Traffic Services at the Langley RCMP detachment.

On July 29, 2013, Mr. Lemaitre and his spouse began their morning as per their usual routine. The television was on and tuned to a local channel which had been broadcasting the morning news. According to Mr. Lemaitre's spouse a news story regarding a 2007 incident (police involved death of Mr. Dziekanski) that had occurred at the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) was featured on the ticker tape. Ms. Lemaitre testified that any reporting in relation to this incident was known to cause Mr. Lemaitre significant stress. Mr. Lemaitre did not speak about what he observed or heard that morning on the news and shortly thereafter left the room and proceeded to the basement of his residence.

At approximately 0815 hours, Ms. Lemaitre left the residence to run errands and returned approximately an hour later. Upon her return, she discovered Mr. Lemaitre in the basement of the residence hanging by a dog leash ligature that was affixed to an exercise machine. She immediately cut the ligature and called 911. First responders attended the scene and attempted resuscitations but were unsuccessful and Mr. Lemaitre was declared deceased at 10:42 hours. The Coroner attended the scene and confirmed the cause of death to be asphyxia due to cervical ligature hanging. The police attended and ruled out foul play.



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Mr. Lemaitre's spouse testified that he had been off work on medical leave for several months prior to his death. At the time of his death, Mr. Lemaitre had been in the care of a general practitioner, a psychologist and a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist testified that at the time of his death, Mr. Lemaitre had been diagnosed with both Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Major Depressive Disorder.

The jury heard that Mr. Lemaitre's mental health was impacted by a series of significant events that he had endured in both his professional and personal life. The impact of the events on Mr. Lemaitre's mental health conditions was shown through documents, including a detailed letter that Mr. Lemaitre wrote to Veteran's Affairs in support of his claim for mental health disability benefits as well as in the testimony provided by Ms. Lemaitre, his physician, psychologist, psychiatrist and through various past and present RCMP members.

In his application to Veteran's Affairs, Mr. Lemaitre stated that he acquired PTSD as a result of exposure to traumatic events he experienced while in the line of duty. He made specific reference to three separate murders of young women and a multiple fatality recreational accident. Several witnesses including Ms. Lemaitre and the physicians that treated Mr. Lemaitre also confirmed that these events were very troubling to Mr. Lemaitre. Mr. Lemaitre stated in his letter that he was not provided with any critical incident debriefings or meaningful mental health support following these incidents.

In the midst of these experiences, Mr. Lemaitre also experienced the break up of his first marriage which was quite troubling to him. As a result of the circumstances of that break up, Mr. Lemaitre transferred from Cranbrook to the Lower Mainland. His two children remained in Cranbrook with their mother. The distance made his relationship with his children difficult and over time that became an additive source of stress.

While stationed in the Lower Mainland, Mr. Lemaitre married a fellow RCMP member. Shortly after they were married, his spouse suffered a debilitating workplace injury for which she would ultimately qualify for long term disability. Mr. Lemaitre assisted in caring for her until his death. In 2004, they suffered yet another major life altering event when their family home was destroyed in a house fire.

Two further events within the workplace would have a profound impact on Mr. Lemaitre's mental health. In 2003, Mr. Lemaitre held the position of media relations liaison with "E" Division's Strategic Communications Branch. He had been called to manage the RCMP response to wild fires in the Interior, and while there, a member of the public (news reporter) confided in him that she had been the subject of sexual harassment by Mr. Lemaitre's direct supervisor. Mr. Lemaitre was troubled by this allegation and after much consideration reported it to senior management. A week later, Mr. Lemaitre was transferred to general duty policing in Chilliwack for what was described as performance issues. His direct supervisor was involved in the transfer decision. A senior RCMP member was assigned to conduct



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an internal review of the matter and determined the transfer had not been made in accordance with established policy and processes.

After a successful posting in Burnaby, Mr. Lemaitre returned to his media relations position in 2006. In October 2007, he was tasked with providing information to news reporters following the police-involved fatality at Vancouver International Airport. Mr. Lemaitre was provided information about the incident by RCMP investigators to share with reporters. The jury heard that bystander video of the incident later surfaced which appeared to contradict the information Mr. Lemaitre initially disclosed. He sought permission from his superiors to correct the public record and was denied. The media eventually obtained the video and Mr. Lemaitre faced accusations of misleading the public and participating in a cover-up. A short time later he was transferred to "E" Division Traffic Services at the Langley detachment against his wishes. He remained in this posting for almost 6 years until he went off on medical leave.

His spouse testified that Mr. Lemaitre experienced workplace bullying and harassment at each detachment he was posted to following his two removals from the Strategic Communications Branch. She testified that Mr. Lemaitre particularly found these incidents distressing, intimidating and demoralizing.

The Chief Psychologist for the RCMP testified that the RCMP has implemented a number of mental health initiatives in the past decade, and specifically in 2014 they implemented a new National Mental Health Strategy focusing on awareness, prevention and intervention. This includes "The Road to Mental Readiness" program designed to enhance resiliency and reduce stigma related to mental health conditions. The Chief Psychologist testified that she was unaware of any tracking mechanism or evidence based data for the effectiveness of the strategy. She was also unable to provide information on the type and number of officers accessing the support and training available to them.



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Pursuant to Section 38 of the Coroners Act, the following recommendations are forwarded to the Chief Coroner of the Province of British Columbia for distribution to the appropriate agency:

JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

To: Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

1. Implement the plan proposed by the Chief Psychologist - RCMP to include mental health assessments to be in conjunction with the 3 year mandatory physical assessment that is already in place

Presiding Coroner Comment: *The jury heard evidence from the Chief Psychologist - RCMP, who explained that all members of the RCMP are required to undergo a physical assessment conducted by a medical practitioner every three years. She testified that there was a plan underway to examine the possibility of requiring a mandatory mental health assessment to be conducted as per the same timeline. The jury provided further rationale that a mandatory mental health assessment would serve to reduce the stigma of attending a psychologist in that all members would be required to complete it. The jury also heard and reasoned that this type of initiative would allow for proactive early detection and intervention of mental health issues.*

2. Offer a variety of learning methods for mental health education for all members of the RCMP.

Presiding Coroner Comment: *The jury heard evidence from the Chief Psychologist - RCMP that the RCMP currently offers a number of supports and training opportunities related to Mental Health for its members. The jury also heard that the bulk of supports and training programs available are either in written brochures or on line (web-based) modules. The Chief Psychologist testified that she was unaware of what consultations were completed regarding the most effective ways to deliver the supports and training. The jury's rationale for this this recommendation was that individuals have different learning styles and that an effective training strategy takes into account various learning styles and modes of delivery.*



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3. Develop measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the RCMP's mental health strategy.

Presiding Coroner Comment: *The jury heard evidence from the Chief Psychologist - RCMP that she has received positive feedback from supervisors that the RCMP's mental health strategy is working. However, she was unable to reference evidence or data related to the effectiveness of any of the mental health strategies that have been implemented. She was also unaware of any feedback from the rank and file members, which make up the majority of the RCMP. The jury's rationale is based on the fact that, without continuous assessment and evaluation, the RCMP will be left in the dark about the effectiveness of strategies and therefore unable to respond appropriately and improve upon them.*

4. Make funding available to implement the recommendations of this jury.

Presiding Coroner Comment: *Self explanatory.*

5. Make classes available to family members on the initial hiring of their loved one to provide an overview of the potential mental health issues that can arise over the years.

Presiding Coroner Comment: *A psychiatrist and expert in PTSD testified that early involvement and consultation with the family is critically important in terms of early detection and treatment of mental health issues. Family members (particularly spouses) are usually first to be affected by and witness the signs and symptoms associated with mental health issues. The psychiatrist testified that by the time mental health issues usually manifest within the workplace, the damage is done. For an individual with mental health challenges, work is usually the last thing to be affected as individuals often cling to it in order to maintain some semblance of normalcy.*