



Health

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## Family of man with epilepsy shot by police want justice, training for officers

By James Armstrong  
Global News

**Watch the video above:  
Man killed by police was likely experience a seizure.  
Mark McAllister reports.**

TORONTO – A man recently killed by police in Durham while running through his street was likely having an epileptic seizure at the time of the shooting.

His wife Marianne, family and health advocates all want more training as a result of the shooting.



Michael MacIsaac, 47, was shot by Durham Regional Police on Dec. 2, 2013 in Ajax. He died in hospital the next day.

MacIsaac's first symptoms of epilepsy showed themselves as tingling along the side of his body. It progressed to him falling over while bricklaying in college. By the time he was 25, he was having seizures, MacIsaac's sister Joanne said.

"I think Michael felt it made him flawed in some way. He never spoke about it. He didn't tell people. He was regimented in his medications and stuff but he always told us if – even when he first brought Marianne around – like, 'Don't tell her. I don't want her to know. I don't want anyone to know.'"

Epilepsy is a physical condition marked by sudden, brief changes in the brain's function. The activity can cause patients to have recurring, unprovoked seizures.

But seizures can vary, ranging from convulsions on one end, to tuning out for just a few seconds.

Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, executive director of Epilepsy Ontario says police need to be aware of how epilepsy can affect a person's behaviour.

"There are more than 40 types of seizures, and those seizures impact people in different ways," she said. "So most people are probably familiar with convulsive seizures. For seizures that don't have convulsive movements, they need to understand the person might exhibit confusion or unusual behaviour, or even a blank stare."

The province's Special investigation Unit (SIU), which is probing the shooting, said police were called after reports of a man "acting in a strange manner."

### **Read More: Inside Epilepsy: An in depth look at the condition.**

The SIU says an "interaction" followed prompting an officer to shoot MacIsaac.

Joanne MacIsaac is hoping that some change will occur as a result of her brother's shooting.

"We want someone to hold accountable for Michael's – for shooting Michael. We want to get all the details and we want the honest details," she said. "There needs to be changes. This can't happen to anyone else."

The SIU is still investigating.

### **Watch the video below: (Jan. 4) Michael MacIsaac's family demands answers.**

Two hours before her brother was shot, he ran out of house. He had a fever that day and stayed home from work.

"It was an hour and about 45 minutes later that he just came out of the room and not making sense, wasn't coherent, was mumbling," Marianne MacIsaac, Michael's wife, said. "He seemed very frustrated, very irritated, and he was completely naked."



Joanne organized her family and had been planning to drive to Ajax to help find Michael.

"The phone rang from Marianne and Marianne was screaming. It was at 12:07. They shot him. And we ran to the car and my niece, Tanya, looked up and it was on the news and she said, 'Aunt Jo, he's been shot twice.'"

Werner-Arcé is urging police agencies across the country to institute training for police officers to understand how to work with people who are having a seizure. Just because a person isn't complying with their demand, doesn't mean they are choosing not to, she said.

“So if they’re calling for someone to stop what they’re doing, to put their hands up, a person just may not be able to understand, to comprehend the message. They just can’t understand what’s being said to them,” she said. “I would suggest that before the police automatically make an assumption that the person is choosing not to comply that they need to think about why that person isn’t complying.”

Epilepsy Ontario, the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance and a group of police officers have started to develop some training for law enforcement when dealing with people who have epilepsy. But Werner-Arcé says more needs to be done.

“There are also some police services that have been very open to seizure awareness training, and so the local epilepsy agency has gone in and has trained officers,” she said. “And what we need is for that to happen across the country.”

But for Marianne, intensive training for police officers is a “start” but not her only goal.

“I do want justice. I want the officer who did this to my husband to be charged. I definitely want him to be charged. He has no idea what he’s done to our family. He’s destroyed my life. He’s destroyed his (Michael’s) mother’s life and his sisters and all his nieces and nephews. And it’s a trauma and a horror I live every day when I wake up. We don’t want this to happen to another family.”

- *With files from Mark McAllister*

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