



Department of Justice

Secretary

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Coroner Ian West
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11
222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Coroner West

Inquest into the death of Thomas Brigham – COR 2004 002347

I refer to the recommendations made in the inquest into the death of Thomas Brigham received by the Department of Justice on 25 June 2013.

In accordance with section 72(3)(4) of the *Coroners Act 2008* the Department of Justice responds to each of your recommendations made below.

- 1. That the Department of Justice initiate and maintain appropriate performance audits of its health service providers, to ensure that all diagnostic services that are available to the general population, are available to the prison population.***

This recommendation was implemented prior to its receipt by the department.

Monitoring of compliance with this recommendation is included as part of the Justice Health Quality Framework 2011 (the Quality Framework) and the Justice Health Performance Monitoring Program for continuous improvement.

Justice Health introduced the Quality Framework on 1 July 2012 across both public and private prisons to drive the delivery of consistently safe, high-quality and evidence-based health care. The Quality Framework incorporates standards to which health care must be delivered and outlines Justice Health's expectations for compulsory monitoring and reporting on the quality of care by setting reporting requirements for Key Result Area Measures, occasions of service, activity data and workforce reporting.

Standard 3.5 of the Quality Framework directs that prisoners are provided with access to allied health and diagnostic services as clinically indicated in line with community standards to meet their treatment needs.

Within the reporting requirements of the Quality Framework the health service provider is required to report monthly on compliance with the Key Result Area relating to the number of patients receiving clinically significant diagnostic results within ten business days of receiving the results.

Justice Health initiated a quarterly Performance Monitoring Program across all prisons in November 2011 whereby five per cent of a prison's health files are audited by Justice Health Clinical Standards and Review Officers to assess compliance against key standards. Justice Health also audits the provision of clinically significant diagnostic results to patients within ten days as part of the Performance Monitoring Program.

2. That the Department of Justice ensures its health service providers implement appropriate cancer screening programs, aimed to make sure cancer detection and treatment among prisoners is not unduly delayed.

This recommendation was implemented prior to its receipt by the department.

GEO Care has provided details of the evidence-based cancer screening programs available to prisoners. GEO Care medical staff use the current recommendations for community general practice with regards to cancer screening. These recommendations are summarised in the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners *Guidelines for preventative activities in general practice* (the Red Book), and in particular, Section 9: Early detection of cancers, which sets out current recommendations for cancer screening. In accordance with the guidelines set out in the Red Book, GEO Care screens for cancer as follows:

- Cervical cancer screening is offered to female prisoners through PAP testing and is actively promoted to all prisoners. Prisoners in high risk groups are followed up and invited to undergo testing as part of a preventative program. A total of 204 PAP samples were undertaken between January 2012 to June 2013.
- Referral for breast cancer screening is based on the current recommendation for mammography, which is every two years from the age of 50 years old and as clinically indicated. Prisoners who are identified as having a familial history at reception or at a later time are also offered screening. A total of 42 mammograms were performed in 2012.
- Bowel cancer screening is undertaken across all prisons where it is clinically indicated and requested by the medical officer. Prisoners are also referred for a colonoscopy where clinically indicated or where a prisoner is identified as having a familial history of bowel cancer.
- Skin cancer screening is available to all prisoners as clinically indicated upon presentation for review of skin lesions. Medical practitioners will perform screening opportunistically whilst performing clinical examinations, lesion excisions, biopsies and histological studies to screen for cancerous lesions as required. Prisoners identified as having a familial history at reception are also offered screening.

- Population based prostate cancer screening is not recommended unless the man specifically requests it and he is counselled on the pros and cons of testing. Screening is currently offered to those within the appropriate age band, and as clinically indicated. Screening is offered by digital rectal examination of the prostate and through Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) pathology testing. Pathology, radiology, medical imaging and referral for secondary care diagnostic testing is available to all prisoners as clinically indicated at the direction of a medical officer. A total of 202 PSA tests were performed in 2012. Data on the number of digital rectal examinations is not available but is contained on a prisoner's individual medical file.

Screening for other conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease and hypertension is provided based on clinical indication and other identified risk factors through pathology and other diagnostic testing. Risk factor screening such as smoking, problem drug use, weight screening, increased cholesterol and blood pressure are undertaken during assessment and following identification advice or a referral is undertaken.

GEO Care will continue to use the Red Book practice guidelines for cancer screening and offer screening to prisoners consistent with community standards. GEO Care have added cancer screening activities as an agenda item to its Medical Advisory Committee and General Practitioners Committee meetings to:

- further develop a consistent approach to cancer screening across all locations
- review current research and best practice guidelines for implementation of cancer screening programs, and
- provide a forum for ongoing education and discussion among practitioners.

GEO Care has also advised it is investigating opportunities to link into community awareness programs to enhance health promotion into the prison community.

Justice Health is satisfied that GEO Care cancer screening programs are based on community standards and are consistent with practices of general practice within the community.

- 3. That the Department of Justice ensure health service providers have procedures set in place for delivery of written communications between the primary health care provider (transfer form, or medical report for doctor, or hospital) and a tertiary health care provider (discharge summary/management plan) and protocols to ensure acknowledgment of receipt and contents. Such communication would be enhanced by the introduction of a planned electronic health record system by Justice Health. It is recommended its introduction be prioritised.**

This recommendation is partially implemented and will be fully implemented.

In accordance with Standard 1.1.6 of the Quality Framework, it is an expectation that health service providers deliver a coordinated system of health care, ensuring timely and appropriate access to specialist referral, tests and their results, relevant screening, clinical treatment and supportive care. It describes the expectation that all necessary health information is provided to ensure a continuum of holistic healthcare. Further, Standard 1.2.9 sets the expectation that after referral to secondary and tertiary healthcare services, consultation and treatment outcomes are followed up by the referring primary healthcare provider.

GEO Care has provided details of its *Transfer of Prisoners* policy which directs that mechanisms are established and maintained to ensure that health information is transferred with a prisoner upon transfer to a tertiary provider and that continuity of care is maintained through the completion of a health information summary.

In following this policy, GEO Care has advised copies of all relevant medical documentation, including test results and referral letters, will accompany a prisoner to the tertiary provider to facilitate optimal care. Upon return to prison, health staff will document on the prisoner's medical record any treatment provided by the tertiary provider, health outcomes, action requiring follow up and ongoing treatment required. Copies of referral letters to external outpatient and other medical specialists, as well as any other correspondence from external agencies, are placed in a prisoner's medical file. Health staff will follow up with the tertiary provider for copies of discharge plans, clarification of treatment, findings and treatment plans if necessary.

Justice Health is satisfied health service providers have adequate procedures in place for the communication of health information between primary and tertiary health care providers.

The department remains committed to implementing an electronic health record system as a priority. Following a select tender process, the State has executed a contract with the preferred software supplier, Intrahealth Limited on 29 August 2013. The implementation project has commenced and Intrahealth's product is being re-branded as JCare. Implementation of JCare in the Victorian prison system is scheduled to commence in 2014.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Larissa Strong, Director, Justice Health on (03) 9947 1625.

Yours sincerely



Greg Wilson
Secretary