



Victorian Institute of
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23 January 2012



Coroner Spooner
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11
222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne 3000 VIC

Re: Jeremy Chandler Court Ref 1449/09

Dear Coroner

I refer to the above inquest and to the following recommendation made on 20 October 2011:

1. To improve the safety of first time prisoners with additional known self-harm risk factors who are initially assessed with either an unknown or low risk self-harm rating, a follow-up formal and recorded session with either a Forensicare or Correction Victoria staff member must take place after the first 24 hours of imprisonment to further assess risk and adjustment issues.

In accordance with section 72(3) of the *Coroners Act 2008*, I wish to inform the Coroner that the recommendation has been implemented.

Following the receipt of the recommendation on 27 October, its possible implementation was considered by Forensicare's clinical governance committee for the Melbourne Assessment Prison. This committee comprises the clinical staff at the Melbourne Assessment Prison including the consultant psychiatrist, the unit manager of the Acute Assessment Unit and Forensicare's nurse practitioner candidates. The role of the Committee is to:

- Address site-specific issues pertaining to quality of clinical risk management;
- Assess quality of prisoner mental health care; and
- Monitor safety and security issues for prisoners.

There was also consultation between Justice Health and Forensicare in regard to the implementation of the recommendation. All services provided by Forensicare at the Melbourne Assessment Prison are provided pursuant to a contract with Justice Health.

Unknown self-harm rating after initial assessment

In circumstances where a prisoner's risk was assessed as "unknown" on reception into custody, the Clinical Governance Committee considered that it is appropriate for Forensicare to conduct a follow up review within 24 hours to reassess risk. Such reviews commenced in January 2012.

Whilst there have been only a few occasions when an "unknown" rating is made, the clinical governance committee were concerned about the use of this rating on the basis that the risk assessment requires an assessment at a particular point in time on the basis of the information available at that time. Accordingly, the Committee decided to amend the risk assessment form to disallow a categorisation of "unknown". The Committee's view was that all prisoners are by definition at low risk at a minimum and that no-one could be considered to have "no risks". Low risk ratings can result in a S4 or S0 rating.

A separate review of the forms is already underway by the nurse practitioner candidates at the Melbourne Assessment Prison which will be completed in March 2012. On completion of the review, new forms will be introduced which do not include an "unknown" category. As an interim measure the "unknown" category on the form will be crossed out prior to use of the forms.

Our orientation and in-service training will be utilised to ensure staff have a good understanding of the purpose of the risk assessment screening tool.

Guidelines to outline the role of the screening assessment process are being developed and will be completed over the next few months

Low self-harm rating after initial assessment

In instances where the first time prisoner's risk of suicide or self harm is assessed at a S4 level, Forensicare has been informed that Corrections Victoria staff will, in accordance with the Deputy Commissioner's Instruction (DCI) 1.02 At Risk Procedures, conduct a follow up review after the first 24 hours of imprisonment to further assess risk and adjustment issues. Prisoners assessed at an S3 level will be managed in accordance with the DCI 1.02.

I note for your information that Forensicare conducts over 5000 receptions into custody per year at the Melbourne Assessment Prison.¹ The majority of these initial assessments result in a prisoner being categorised as being at low risk of self-harm. The clinical utility of conducting a further assessment within 24 hours of all first time prisoners with a low self-harm risk is unknown. It would not be feasible for Forensicare to reassess all first time prisoners with a low self-harm risk within 24 hours under the current contract service levels.

¹ In 2009-2010, 5663 reception assessments were conducted.

Correctional staff can request a risk assessment of any prisoner at any time if concerns arise. Pursuant to the contract for services, such assessments are conducted by Forensicare within 24 hours of request.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dalton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Dalton.
Chief Executive Officer