



22 March 2012

Deputy State Coroner Ian West
Coroners Court of Victoria
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Dear Coroner West

**Re 3546/07 Inquest into the death of Garry John Stephens
Findings handed down on 2 December 2011**

I have read your findings in the above Inquest together with your recommendations and respond as follows on behalf of St Vincent's Correctional Health Service (SVCHS).

Recommendation 1

You have recommended: *"That the Melbourne Assessment Prison and Port Phillip Prison ensure protocols are in place that confirm the original medical file accompanies a prisoner upon transfer to another prison; i.e., that transfer does not occur until the file is available."*

My following comments are premised by the facts that:

- SVCHS does not provide medical services at the Melbourne Assessment Prison; and
- SVCHS is not responsible for prisoner transport and/or transfers from Port Phillip Prison ("PPP"), but does consult with G4S Custodial Services Pty Ltd ("G4S") as required in relation to transfers and/or transport of prisoners.

In light of my comments, your recommendation is a sound principle and may at times briefly lead to the delay of transfer of some patients from the Melbourne Assessment Prison to the Metropolitan Remand Centre, PPP, or other prisons, until the original medical files are retrieved from the Forensic Care archive if the patient has not been in custody for some time but has a previous history of incarceration.

Occasionally the situation will arise where due to operational or security issues, the State requests that a patient move on from PPP with short notice so that the transfer is attended to without the complete original medical file being available. The State's decisions are



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made in light of numerous factors that SVCHS are not aware of and are the subject of confidentiality. From SVCHS' perspective as a health services provider, in such circumstances delaying the transfer until the file is available would not pose a significant problem, however the timing of transfers is not the responsibility of SVCHS and not a matter over which it has control. Other factors come into play.

If it does occur that a patient arrives at PPP without a full medical file, SVCHS staff take steps to address it and seek the medical material from the transferring prison.

At times at PPP there will be occasions when the complete original medical file is not available to be transferred with the prisoner as the file has been forwarded to Justice Health. In these situations, requests for files to SVCHS from Justice Health may have been triggered by, for example, a subpoena for the file or a request for the information from the file under a Freedom of Information application. In such circumstances SVCHS operates from a temporary file document which is not a copy of the complete file.

SVCHS is having ongoing discussions with G4S and with Justice Health about this issue of transferring prisoners when their full medical file is not available.

At all relevant times the medical files are transferred in a sealed red bag that SVCHS is responsible for packing and sealing.

Recommendation 2

You have recommended: "*That the Melbourne Assessment Prison and PPP ensure protocols are in place that confirm timely dispensing of prescribed medication and that a prisoner's medication accompanies him upon transfer to another prison.*"

It is the policy of SVCHS that patients are transferred to other correctional facilities with the appropriate medication, which is packed in a manner such that it may be utilised at the receiving prison.

The occasional exception to this situation would occur if it were imperative that the patient be transferred to another prison at short notice and without time for the medication to be supplied by SVCHS. This may occur in circumstances where such advice is received from G4S at short notice, who in turn will have received short notice from the State for reasons that neither party are made privy to.

In such a situation contact will be made by SVCHS staff with the receiving health provider to ascertain the providers' ability to medicate the patient from its imprest stock. In the event that an arrangement with the receiving health provider cannot be reached, G4S would be advised.

Finally, at all relevant times the transferring prisoner's medication is transferred in the sealed red bag containing the prisoner's medical file. Again, SVCHS is responsible for the packing and sealing thereof.

I trust the foregoing assists the Court. I will be happy to furnish further information upon request.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Vale
Executive Director
Medical Services, Aged and Community Care