



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 3rd and 18th days of December 2008, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Mark Frederick Johns, State Coroner, into the death of Adrian Lee Edwards.

The said Court finds that Adrian Lee Edwards aged 31 years, late of 30/17 Zwerner Drive, Hallett Cove, South Australia died at Bedford Park, South Australia on the 13th day of March 2007 as a result of haemorrhage due to incised wound to left arm with amphetamine toxicity as a possible contributing factor. The said Court finds that the circumstances of his death were as follows:

1. Introduction and reason for Inquest

- 1.1. Adrian Lee Edwards was 31 years of age at the time of his death on 13 March 2007. At the time of his death he was in an ambulance, having inflicted penetrating wounds to his left arm. He had been combative with ambulance officers and a police officer had travelled in the ambulance with the ambulance officers. Mr Edwards had been handcuffed to prevent him fighting and resisting the treatment being afforded by the ambulance officers. The handcuffs had been affixed by a police officer. While en route to the Flinders Medical Centre Mr Edwards collapsed and was probably dead on arrival at the Flinders Medical Centre. According, he was in custody at the time of his death and this Inquest was held pursuant to section 21(1)(a) of the Coroner's Act 2003.

2. The events of 13 March 2007

- 2.1. Mr Edwards had a history of personality disorder, possible epilepsy, possible schizophrenia, polysubstance abuse (including intravenous drug use) and previous suicide attempts. On the morning of 13 March 2007 at approximate 0645 hours Mr Edwards made a triple zero call which was taken by Constable Kerry Mowday of the SAPOL Communications Branch. During that call, Mr Edwards was extremely difficult to understand. However, Constable Mowday understood him to have said that he may have slit his throat and that there was blood everywhere. Mr Edwards stopped speaking before Constable Mowday could obtain further information. The line remained open and Mr Edwards could be heard groaning in the background. The triple zero call showed an active phone connection to Adrian Edwards of 30/17 Zwerner Drive, Hallett Cove. The first police patrol was tasked at 6:33am and at 6:34am the operator advised that the South Australian Ambulance Service were to be advised. Three police patrol cars from the Sturt Local Service Area were despatched to the address. The patrols arrived between 6:42am and 6:46am at Mr Edwards' unit. Officers found the unit secure and attempted to gain access. One of the officers heard a male voice call out 'help' once from inside the unit. She was able to look through the kitchen window and saw blood in the kitchen and heard a male continuing to groan.
- 2.2. Police Communications were advised that it was going to be necessary for the premises to be broken into and the State Duty Officer was to be advised. The State Duty Officer, Inspector Lambert, was advised. Inspector Lambert was informed that officers on the scene could hear a person inside the premises making groaning noises. In the circumstances Inspector Lambert formed the opinion that the occupant was in need of urgent medical or other assistance and gave authorisation under section 83C(1) of the Summary Offences Act 1953 for the attending patrols to effect entry into the premises by force. The officers on the scene gained entry by smashing a front window to the premises. The officers observed a male person, who I find was Mr Edwards, lying on his left side in the hall way adjacent to the kitchen. In the meantime, an ambulance had arrived and the ambulance crew consisting of Mr Smith and Mr Alyward had entered the house.
- 2.3. Mr Edwards was lying on the floor with his torso in the passageway and his legs in the kitchen. There were bloodstains on the carpet in the passageway and in the lounge room. The ambulance officers noted a deep laceration to the inside of Mr Edwards'

left elbow but there was no visible injury to his throat. Ambulance Officer Mr Alyward observed that Mr Edwards was thrashing around in what he described as a combative manner. A police officer asked Mr Alyward if he needed the patient to be restrained but this was declined at that time. A sterile dressing was applied to the wound. Mr Alyward attempted to place an oxygen mask on Mr Edwards' face but Mr Edwards continually tore this off as soon as it was placed. Mr Alyward found a carotid pulse, which was weak, and he was unable to insert a cannula successfully because of Mr Edwards' resistance. Mr Edwards was thrashing around and pulling away from the ambulance officers. He was physically strong and was yelling 'stop'.

- 2.4. The police obtained a stretcher from the ambulance and brought it into the house and the ambulance officers attempted to get Mr Edwards onto the stretcher. Mr Edwards was constantly resisting but was eventually placed onto the stretcher. The ambulance officers then used seatbelt style restraints on the stretcher to restrain Mr Edwards. The restraints were at chest level and at thigh level. Constable Gerrie could see that Mr Edwards was obstructing his own medical treatment by swinging his arms in an arc towards Ambulance Officer Alyward. At this point Mr Alyward agreed that Mr Edwards may need further restraining and Constable Gerrie applied two sets of handcuffs, one to each of Mr Edwards' wrists. The other end of the handcuffs was applied to the respective side rails of the stretcher. Mr Edwards was placed in the ambulance under the treatment of the ambulance officers. Constable Gerrie sat in the back of the ambulance on the journey to the Flinders Medical Centre.
- 2.5. On the journey to Flinders Medical Centre Mr Alyward monitored Mr Edwards' pulse, breathing and his pupils' reactivity to light. Mr Edwards continued to struggle. The ambulance made contact with Flinders Medical Centre and advised a triage nurse of their estimated time of arrival.
- 2.6. Before the ambulance arrived at Flinders Medical Centre Mr Edwards stopped moving. His carotid pulse was checked and Mr Alyward was unable to locate a pulse. He could not hear any heart sounds, even with a stethoscope. With the assistance of Constable Gerrie, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation was commenced and continued until the ambulance arrived at the hospital at 7:18am. Mr Edwards was taken from the ambulance to the resuscitation room and resuscitative efforts were continued. The handcuffs were removed and Mr Edwards was transferred from the stretcher to a bed. Mr Edwards had no pulse, no heart sounds and no respiratory effort. His pupils were fixed and dilated. The emergency registrar and hospital staff intubated Mr Edwards

and started cardiac massage. He was given adrenaline through a tracheal tube and later an intravenous line was inserted. Mr Edwards was defibrillated at least six times. However, no cardiac output was obtained and Mr Edwards was pronounced deceased at 7:55am.

3. Cause of death

- 3.1. An autopsy was conducted by Dr John Gilbert, Forensic Pathologist, on 14 March 2007. His report was admitted and marked Exhibit C3a in these proceedings. At autopsy he noted an incised wound to the anterior aspect of the left upper arm and involving the left cubital fossa. A two centimetre long longitudinal incision was found in the cephalic vein and this was the apparent source of the blood loss noted at the scene. There was a paucity of blood in the heart and major vessels and mild organ pallor was noted. These findings were consistent with significant blood loss.
- 3.2. Dr Gilbert noted that Mr Edwards' stomach contained obvious tablet residues. There were small amounts of gastric contents in the trachea and also in the bronchi of the lower lobe of the right lung.
- 3.3. Dr Gilbert found markings attributable to handcuffs around both wrists. He found scattered red bruises over the forearms consistent with restraint of Mr Edwards. He found no sign of rib fractures or other internal injuries.
- 3.4. An analysis of a specimen of blood obtained at autopsy showed a blood alcohol concentration of zero. The blood contained a greater than therapeutic level of oxycodone, a high level of amphetamine and a high therapeutic concentration of temazepam. Empty containers of prescribed dexamphetamine, oxycodone and temazepam were found at the scene. Tablet residues were noted in the stomach at autopsy. It appears likely that the deceased had attempted a mixed overdose of all three drugs.
- 3.5. Dr Gilbert said that given the deceased's agitated behaviour prior to departure from the scene in the ambulance it is quite unlikely that the central nervous system depressant effects of oxycodone and temazepam contributed to the death. He said it is possible that a high level of amphetamine in the blood coupled with impaired perfusion of the myocardium due to significant blood loss could have precipitated a cardiac arrhythmia. Dr Gilbert said that restraint by handcuffing the deceased to the ambulance stretcher would have been quite unlikely to have contributed to the death.

He said that indeed the deceased's agitation was such that, without restraint, it had proved impossible to administer oxygen or intravenous therapy, which were both vital in treating major haemorrhage.

- 3.6. In the result, Dr Gilbert found that death was caused by haemorrhage due to an incised wound of the left arm with amphetamine toxicity as a possible contributing factor and I so find.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1. In my opinion the decision to handcuff Mr Edwards for his own medical treatment was entirely justifiable. Mr Edwards had displayed suicidal tendencies in the past and it was plain from his behaviour immediately prior to making the triple zero call that, despite having made that call, his intention was to harm himself. It may be that he changed his mind and that was the reason for the triple zero call. However, the blood loss, which had taken place already, was such that Mr Edwards' change of mind, if that is what it was, was too late.
- 4.2. I conclude that the police and ambulance officers acted appropriately in the circumstances and that the decision to break into Mr Edwards' house for his medical treatment was lawful. Furthermore, the decision to restrain him in the ambulance was also lawful and appropriate.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1. I have no recommendations to make in this matter.

Key Words: Death in Custody

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 18th day of December, 2008.

State Coroner