



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 2nd day of December 2010 and the 23rd day of September 2011, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Mark Frederick Johns, State Coroner, into the death of Dorothy Josephine Blythe.

The said Court finds that Dorothy Josephine Blythe aged 81 years, late of 41 Whittington Street, Enfield, South Australia died at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia on the 10th day of May 2009 as a result of ischaemic bowel. The said Court finds that the circumstances of her death were as follows:

1. Introduction and reason for Inquest

- 1.1. Dorothy Josephine Blythe was 81 years of age when she died on 10 May 2009. At the time of her death she was detained pursuant to the Mental Health Act 1993 at the Glenside Campus of the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Accordingly, hers was a death in custody and this Inquest was held as required by section 21(1)(a) of the Coroners Act 2003.

2. Background, cause and circumstances of death

- 2.1. Ms Blythe had suffered significant physical and mental health problems throughout her life including major depression with intermittent psychotic features, hypertension, peptic ulcer disease and gastroesophageal reflux, extreme vaginal prolapse, severe scoliosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Her main problem over many years was her depression with intermittent psychosis. In the 1980s she had four admissions to the Hillcrest Hospital and in 1988 suffered a severe psychotic depression requiring electro-convulsive therapy. That treatment had excellent results and she remained well until 2006 when she had a relapse.

2.2. In March 2009 she tripped on the pavement outside her house and fell sustaining a fracture to the left humerus. She was treated for the fracture in the Royal Adelaide Hospital and, on 26 March 2009, was transferred to the Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre where she was to undergo rehabilitation before returning home. During her stay at Hampstead she became increasingly depressed and withdrawn. She would not eat properly and would not cooperate with the rehabilitation programs. As her health steadily worsened she was transferred back to the Royal Adelaide for management. She was detained under the Mental Health Act 1993 on the grounds of severe melancholic depression and self neglect. On 8 May 2009 her detention was reviewed and confirmed for 21 days on the grounds of major depression. By this stage she had been transferred to the Glenside Campus of the Royal Adelaide Hospital. On 9 May 2009 her physical health declined and there were changes to her blood pressure. At 11pm that day she was showing signs of shock and was transferred to the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Upon admission to the Royal Adelaide Hospital shortly after midnight on 10 May 2009 she was cold, clammy and confused. She had severely distended and rigid abdomen. At 1:30am she underwent an exploratory laparotomy which found extensive ischaemia of the bowel. The surgeons considered that the situation was not compatible with life. Ms Blythe died at 11:30am. A medical deposition was prepared by a medical practitioner from the Royal Adelaide Hospital who gave an opinion as to cause of death. That opinion was ischaemic bowel, and I so find.

2.3. In my opinion Ms Blythe's treatment during her detention was appropriate.

3. Recommendations

3.1. I have no recommendations to make in this matter.

Key Words: Death in Custody; Psychiatric/Mental Illness

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

Seal the 23rd day of September, 2011.

State Coroner