

For immediate release 3 October 2007

INQUEST OPENS INTO DEATH OF VULNERABLE 18 YEAR OLD STEVEN HART

**10am Thursday 4 October
Before Deputy Coroner John Sleightholme
sitting at Harrogate Magistrates Court,
Victoria Avenue, Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG1 1LS**

The inquest into the death of 18 year old Steven Hart begins at 10am on Thursday 4 October at Harrogate Magistrates Court. Steven died on 26 September 2002, approximately ten hours after discharging himself from a psychiatric ward at the Friarage Hospital, Northallerton. In the ten hours before his death, Steven wandered penniless in the local countryside, having left the hospital on his own, trying to find his way to his home in Harrogate.

Two days before his death Steven was taken by members of his family to Harrogate Hospital where he was known to the staff and had agreed to be admitted. He had a history of paranoid schizophrenia and on this occasion was in a disorientated state. After his family left him it was discovered that there was no bed available at Harrogate Hospital and Steven was transferred to another hospital not known to him and miles away in Northallerton. His family was not informed of this transfer.

The following day Steven appeared to have stabilised and sought to discharge himself. No transport could have been immediately arranged for him and as such Steven chose to leave on his own. He had to ask a nurse to show him the way out of the hospital grounds as he could not read the signs to the hospital exit and also could not remember his admission.

In the hours that followed, four 999 calls were made by members of the public observing Steven's strange behaviour, appearing lost and vulnerable as he apparently wandered in circles trying to find a road home. Finally, approximately eight hours after he left the hospital, a police officer found Steven and gave him a lift to the A61 road to Ripon and Harrogate, leaving him to set off on foot at its intersection with the A1. Less than an hour later, having removed his clothes, Steven was run over and killed by a passing car. No blame is attached to the motorist concerned.

The inquest into Steven's death will examine the circumstances leading to his death, his hospital discharge, the failure to make his family aware of his transfer, the time it took for the concerns of members of the public to be dealt with and the actions of police officers.

Steven's mother is represented at the Inquest by INQUEST Lawyers Group member Ruth Bunday of Harrison Bunday solicitors in Leeds.

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Notes to editors:

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner's courts.

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
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