

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release Monday 28 July 2008

CRITICAL VERDICT AT INQUEST INTO DEATH OF STEPHEN BROWN IN HMP DONCASTER

An inquest jury sitting at Doncaster Magistrates Court has today exposed a litany of serious failings at the privately run Doncaster prison, regarding the care of 23 year old Stephen Brown who died as a result of streptococcal septicaemia at Doncaster Royal Infirmary on 19 March 2003, less than a week after arriving at the prison.

During the month-long inquest, distressing evidence was heard about Stephen's appalling medical and physical condition on arrival at the hospital. Evidence was heard from several other prisoners that they had repeatedly told nursing staff that Stephen was not simply suffering from the effects of drug withdrawal and that they were worried about his deteriorating health. Despite this information and concerns being raised by a prison officer, nursing staff failed to undertake basic assessments, including taking temperature and pulse. Stephen was only transferred to hospital after he suffered a cardiac arrest. Nursing staff at Doncaster Royal Infirmary described being shocked by Stephen's appearance on arrival at the hospital, with one experienced nurse saying that she had never seen someone in this condition in 20 years of practice.

Stephen was chained to a prison officer in the hospital until the last minutes of his life although he was unable to move and evidently critically ill. The jury upheld the family's assertions that they had repeatedly asked for handcuffs to be removed from Stephen as he lay dying in hospital, but this had been refused as it was "not prison policy".

Stephen's family, who have waited five years for this inquest, said:

"What we have heard at Stephen's inquest over the last four weeks is that the prison failed absolutely in its duty of care to our lovely son. Our son had his problems, but we believed he would be safe when he was in prison. Instead he was left to die in squalor and pain. He did not deserve that, nobody does."

Philippa Matthews of Howells Solicitors, said:

"Stephen Brown died just over five years ago. We heard at the inquest that Doncaster prison have implemented changes since Stephen's death. Let's hope that the changes that we have been told of mean that these tragic circumstances are never repeated."

continues...

Sian Griffiths, Casework Service Manager at INQUEST, said:

“The treatment of Stephen Brown in Doncaster prison was degrading and inhumane. The failure by the prison to provide even the most basic nursing care to this critically ill man clearly shocked hospital staff and represents a completely unacceptable failure in the state’s duty of care.”

Stephen Brown’s family was represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members barrister Leslie Thomas of Garden Court Chambers instructed by Philippa Matthews of Howells Solicitors, Sheffield.

Notes to editors:

The jury returned a narrative verdict in the form of answers to 14 questions, which we have reflected in this press release.

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 and conducts policy work on the issues arising.

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