

News

FATHER OF INMATE WHO DIED FROM MEDICATION SAYS

She had slurred speech

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HE KNEW there was something wrong with his daughter, who was in prison, because she had slurred speech and slow reaction.

But when he told prison officers of her condition, Mr Lian Hock Kwee, 59, said nothing was done.

From the time Ms Lian Huizuan was jailed for drug abuse on May 6, 2010, to the day she died after collapsing after a drill on March 2, 2011, he visited her about six times.

And almost every time, he told officers there was something wrong with her, he said.

Ms Lian, 27, died due to toxicity from drugs she was taking for depression, in the presence of a chronic hepatitis C infection.

State Coroner Janet Wang said yesterday "from evidence, the most probable cause of death was slow and sustained increase of amitriptyline toxicity... with chronic hepatitis C infection (that was undetected from timely intervention...)

"A greater degree of supervision by medical and non-medical staff could have (resulted in early detection)." (See report on right.)

Mr Lian told The New Paper yesterday: "If there's something (inmates) tell us parents, and we tell (the prisons), don't ignore it. There must be mutual communication... We, too, would like to give our child a second chance."

He said he noticed the changes in his daughter especially after she was hospitalised from Aug 27 to Sept 4 in 2010.

When he asked her why she was slurring and so slow, she said the doctor had changed her medication.

He told her to ask if the doctor could reduce the dosage and she said there was no point as he would not believe her, he said.

"I hope the Prisons wake up their idea (get its act together). (Inmates like her) are sentenced for rehabilitation. They should be more proactive with the inmates. They are addicts who should be given care," he said.

Mr Lian said he was upset to hear about the quality of the medical care.

"It's really ridiculous. (Four minutes per patient) is so fast... I had (previously) accompanied her to the Institute of Mental Health to see the psychiatrist there and so many questions were asked. The time is so short they probably can't see what's going on."

Ms Lian had previously been jailed twice for theft and substance abuse. After her second conviction though, she tried to change for the better, Mr Lian said.

She previously took no pains to hide her substance abuse, even sniffing glue in front of her daughters, now 9 and 11.

"(But) because of her children, she tried



"I hope the Prisons wake up their idea."

— Mr Lian Hock Kwee (right), whose daughter died when she was a Changi Women's Prisons inmate

TNP PICTURE: JONATHAN CHOO

her best. She was staying with us (Mr Lian and his second wife). She was hoping her children could grow up well. In the end, she still succumbed to it."

The girls are in a children's home but stay with Mr Lian on weekends and school holidays. He is trying to apply for custody of the children.

Ms Lian was in divorce proceedings when she died. Her husband is in and out of prison, said Mr Lian.

The taxi driver added he was upset prison staff called him only about two hours after she was declared dead.

He was told to show up at the mortuary the next day, he said. By then, her autopsy had already been done.

"When the children saw her, they were shocked... their personalities changed. One of them became too quiet, she keeps forgetting things, does everything so slowly. The other one is too street-smart, started telling lies, stealing."

He said Ms Lian was close to her kids: "Sticky like bubblegum. Everywhere they went, everything they did had to be together."

He took them to the prisons about three times to see their mother, including the last time he saw his daughter.

"I could feel she was sad she couldn't be with her children."

For now, Mr Lian keeps in a Ziploc bag his prison's visitor card, news clippings on his daughter, and her death certificate.

It's for the kids, he said.

"When they grow up and wonder what happened to their mother. So they know what I do, what I've done. How I want them to be. I don't want them to follow in her footsteps."

Prisons' statement

"THE Singapore Prison Service extends our condolences to the family of Lian Huizuan.

We wish to reaffirm our commitment in ensuring the safe and secure custody of all inmates under our care.

Immediate medical attention is provided when inmates report any feeling of discomfort or are found to be ill at any point of their incarceration.

In the case of Lian Huizuan, she received immediate medical care and attention from the staff of Raffles Medical Group, Prisons' appointed medical service provider at the time.

As of 2013, Parkway Shenton has taken over as our appointed medical service provider. We will work closely with them to continue to provide quality health care to inmates, so as to ensure prompt detection of unwell inmates and provision of proper medical attention."

Coroner urges prison to fix systemic gaps

STATE Coroner Janet Wang said yesterday that gaps in the prison system played a part in Ms Lian Huizuan's death.

She had been undergoing treatment for depression, asthma and hepatitis C. She was treated with three types of drugs for her depression.

The cause of her death was toxicity from these drugs, in the presence of a chronic hepatitis C infection.

Ms Wang said this case showed that there could have been better communication, a higher doctor-patient ratio and more care in documentation of dosages at the prison.

BETTER COMMUNICATION

The prison's doctor and psychiatrist, both from Raffles Medical Group, should have been "mindful of pre-existing medical conditions and the effects of medicines prescribed".

"Cross referencing of (their) case notes was sparing."

HIGHER DOCTOR-PATIENT RATIO

The inmates were overseen by a "markedly small" number of medical staff over "markedly short periods of time". The psychiatrist visited once weekly and averaged four minutes per patient, for example.

MORE CARE IN DOCUMENTATION

Prescription charts contained documentation errors that were overlooked.

"No checks were done to ensure prescriptions on packets, prescription charts and doctors' case notes tallied... such a process inevitably increased the risk of mistakes."

This also encouraged nursing staff to "sign blindly without proper verification, as seen in the present case".

But since the labels corresponding to Ms Lian's packets had been discarded, she said it was inconclusive whether an incorrect dosage of medicine was given to her.

NO REVIEW

It was of some concern that no review was done on Ms Lian after she had been hospitalised from Aug 27 to Sept 4, 2010, on whether she was fit for drills.

"It would be ideal if prison officers are attuned to the sensitivities of inmates, to facilitate effective communication of their concerns."

Overall, she said: "This individual incident revealed various systemic lacunae (gaps) which the prison system is urged to review."



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