

Mr C A Oliver
HM Senior Assistant Coroner for County Durham & Darlington
HM Coroner's Office
PO Box 282
Bishop Auckland
Co Durham
DL14 4FY

9 February 2016

Dear Sir

Inquest touching the death of Derek Thomas
Date of death: 28 August 2014 – HMP Durham

I write in response to your report dated 15 December 2015 made under paragraph 7, Schedule 5 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013.

G4S Forensic & Medical Services (UK) Ltd took over responsibility for provision of healthcare services at HMP Durham on 1 April 2015.

G4S Forensic & Medical Services (UK) Ltd is responsible for primary care and substance misuse care at HMP Durham and employs a team totalling in excess of 40 individuals made up of qualified registered general nurses, mental health nurses, substance misuse issues nurses and healthcare support workers, together with separate administration staff, for this work.

An organisation called Spectrum Community Health CIC is contracted separately to provide GP, specialist substance misuse GP and Pharmacy Services at HMP Durham.

Mental health services at HMP Durham are provided by Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust. As part of its responsibilities, the mental health team is responsible for conducting mental health assessments.

The reception process at HMP Durham involves prisoners being brought to the reception building by escorts. Each prisoner is received by prison officers and undergoes initial reception assessments and procedures.

Healthcare staff undertaking initial assessments of individuals arriving at the prison from court are not located in the reception building.

The arriving prisoner undergoes the full reception process with prison officers before the initial healthcare assessment is undertaken.

Following completion of reception procedures, each prisoner is ready to be taken for initial healthcare assessment. At this point the prisoner is escorted by prison officers from the reception building to a separate building which houses the First Night Centre/Induction Wing.

Any documentation received with the prisoner on arrival at the prison is taken by prison officers with the prisoner and all of the documentation received with the prisoner is handed to the nurse undertaking the initial healthcare assessment. The reception procedure means nurses undertaking initial healthcare assessments rely on prison officers to provide them with the correct paperwork for each prisoner they are to assess.

Healthcare procedures involve any Suicide/Self-Harm Warning Form (SSHWF) received for a prisoner being scanned onto SystemOne so that it forms part of the prisoner's medical record.

If the relevant section on the PER form is completed to indicate the presence of a SSHWF and this form does not arrive with the prisoner, then the nurse makes enquiries to locate the document.

The initial health screen involves the nurse completing an assessment covering all aspects of the prisoner's health using an approved NHS assessment tool on SystemOne. The assessment is based on observations of the prisoner's condition, behaviour and presentation, documentation and conversation with the prisoner. Any documentation is one element making up the overall assessment to ensure the prisoner is safe, not at immediate risk and is correctly referred for any additional support required.

Mr Thomas' initial healthcare assessment notes information contained within the PER, including the correct nature of the offence, 4 previous incidences of self-harm and prior treatment for depression.

Mr Thomas was referred by the nurse to a GP in relation to substance misuse issues. The nurse undertaking the initial healthcare assessment is able to refer prisoners to a number of support services following initial assessment, including the mental health team, a GP, the substance misuse team and counselling.

On 22 July 2014, Mr Thomas was assessed by a GP, [REDACTED] and, as a result, Mr Thomas was monitored by healthcare staff for 48 hours for signs of substance withdrawal. The records suggest [REDACTED] had no concerns regarding suicide or self-harm risks.

All nurses working at HMP Durham are ACCT trained. If any nurse perceived a risk of harm to self for any prisoner then ACCT procedures would be commenced.

The nurse who carried out Mr Thomas' initial healthcare assessment is a qualified mental health nurse and substance misuse worker. It is the policy at HMP Durham to aim to have all initial healthcare assessments undertaken by qualified mental health nurses, unless there are circumstances preventing this. By arranging for initial assessments to be undertaken by qualified mental health professionals, this ensures full consideration of mental health issues during the assessments.

The deceased's medical records indicate pertinent information contained on the PER, including risks relating to self-harm/suicide and mental health issues, was considered and noted by the reception nurse. The deceased was not considered at risk of self-harm at that time, based on the documentation, his presentation, conversation and the nurse's observations. This view was reinforced by the assessment by [REDACTED] on 22 July 2014.

On 24 July 2014, Mr Thomas again attended court. It is my understanding court/escort officers did not at this time perceive any risk of suicide or self-harm and no SSHWF was completed.

Further, Mr Thomas presented with no mental health or suicide/self-harm issues over a period of the next 4 weeks prior to his tragic death on 28 August 2014. Mr Thomas was seen by healthcare staff on 8 occasions prior to his death.

There was no indication or notification to healthcare from any member of staff, visitor or professional visitor at any time whilst at HMP Durham that there were any suicide or self-harm concerns relating to Mr Thomas.

The following further steps have been taken to address your concerns surrounding other issues arising at the inquest:-

- nursing staff have been instructed to read/review all documents given to them pertaining to all patients when completing reception screening.
- at staff meetings/briefings, staff have been reminded of the importance of ensuring all paperwork and documentation relating to an individual accompanies that person following their arrival at the prison.

I trust my response addresses the healthcare concerns outlined in your recent report.

Yours sincerely


Head of Healthcare at HMP Durham