

Inquest into the death of Desmond Sims

Desmond Sims was 62 years old when, on 26 January 2011, having been a prisoner for nearly six years, he died at the Princess Alexandra Hospital Secure Unit. His premature death was expected since at least July 2010 when Mr Sims was informed of his diagnosis of advanced lung cancer. He subsequently refused further examination or treatment for the cancer and received palliative care at Wolston Correctional Centre and Princess Alexandra Hospital Secure Unit until his death.

State Coroner Terry Ryan delivered his findings of inquest on 6 December 2013.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported.

Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible agency named in the response.

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One area that does warrant attention is the adequacy of communication between health staff at the Princess Alexandra Hospital Secure Unit and, in this case, the Wolston Correctional Centre. The inquest heard that, despite being employed by Queensland Health at that time (and now by the local health and hospital service) the email and information technology accounts of medical staff based in prisons were linked to the Department of Community Safety and not the Queensland Health intranet. The result is that recording and data collection processes for inmate health matters are paper based, and some email may be lost if incorrectly addressed. Access to the Queensland Health intranet would provide for improved transfer of information between hospitals and prisons.

Health staff working in prisons are also disadvantaged in that they do not have access to a range of electronic clinical resources available to similar employees in community settings. The inquest heard from the nursing director for West Moreton Hospital and Health Service District, which employs the medical staff at Wolston Correctional Centre, Ms Laura Dyer. She stated that significant progress had been made since the death of Mr Sims to address these problems but that further technical and funding challenges remained.

I am satisfied from Ms Dyer's evidence that these are being addressed appropriately. Although I do not consider that a specific recommendation is necessary, I endorse the efforts of officers from Queensland Health and Queensland Corrective Services in facilitating the resolution of these impediments to information sharing.

Response and Action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Health

On 21 January 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The West Moreton Hospital Health Service (WMHHS) in liaison with the Health Service Information Agency (HSIA) identified a technology solution to establish direct access to the Queensland Health intranet, databases and investigation results by staff based in correctional facilities (the information communications technology public safety network).

A three month pilot has been completed at the Brisbane Correctional Centre which allowed medical and nursing staff to access email and information technology accounts on the Queensland Health network.

The WMHHS will continue to liaise with statewide prison mental health services to assist in the identification of infrastructure and financial requirements to deliver this recommendation.

On 10 May 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The WMHHS in liaison with the HSIA received approval to further deploy the project to all prison health services across Queensland. This project will provide prison health services across Queensland, connectivity with Queensland Health and associated hospital and health service systems, including transition to Queensland Health email and an electronic notes system. WMHHS has convened initial meeting to establish the project governance, board and committee.

Connection to the Queensland Health computers, intranet, systems and transition to electronic notes is projected to occur in 2016.

On 12 September 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The WMHHS, in liaison with the eHealth Queensland is installing Queensland Health computers into correctional centres across the state. The project will ensure the provision of QH technology services i.e. Consumer Integrated Mental Health Application (CIMHA) to all prison health services across Queensland.