



**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE: Coroner Judgement of Inquiry and Inquest
Inquisition and Recommendations**

Department of Justice, Legal Services
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Yukon Coroners Service: Judgement of Inquiry into the death of: Judith Foster

Coroner Investigative File No.: 4520201223

Name: Judith Foster Date of Birth: 1949/06/01 Date of Death: 2012/09/19

YYYY/MM/DD

YYYY/MM/DD

Address: Whitehorse

Street Address

Province/Territory

Postal Code

Ethnic Origin: Caucasian Location of Death: Whitehorse

Cause of Death

Mixed Drug Toxicity. Chronic Pain - Motor Vehicle Accident and Advanced Degenerative Spondylosis, is noted as a contributory factor in the death.

Manner of Death

Accidental

Autopsy Findings

An autopsy was performed on September 24, 2102 at 09:15hours at Vancouver General Hospital. The principal pathological findings were elevated concentrations of hydromorphone, zopiclone, and fluoxetine detected in the post mortem blood. There were pill fragments identified within the stomach contents.

Ms. Foster had atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and chronic hepatitis. There were emphysematous changes in the lungs.

Toxicological Findings

Toxicology testing was performed at BC Provincial Toxicology Centre in Vancouver. Samples of blood, stomach contents, and vitreous fluids were submitted for analysis. The report of analysis shows hydromorphone (0.082mg/L), zopiclone (0.12mg/L), fluoxetine (0.87mg/L), norfluoxetine (.83mg/L), oxycodone .01mh/L), acetaminophen, gabapentin, tetrahydrocannabinol (.012 mg/L), and 11-carboxytetrahydrocannabinol (.063mg/L) in post mortem blood.

Circumstances of Death

Ms. Foster had a history of prescription medication overuse, past illicit drug use, as well as chronic pain. The chronic pain was attributed to a previous motor vehicle accident and Degenerative Spondylosis. Two opioid medications were prescribed concurrently along with other medications with sedating effects. At the request of Ms. Foster, multiple early renewals in large quantities of medication were prescribed and dispensed. Ms. Foster was permitted to self-adjust Endocet, lorazepam and zopiclone dosage. Ms. Foster was hospitalized on June 3, 2012 with a decreased level of consciousness secondary to narcotic overuse and excessive sedation. Canadian Guidelines for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain have established standards to assist physicians in achieving balance of the effectiveness of opioid pain management while mitigating possible negative effects of opioid use such as addiction and/or aberrant drug-related behavior. There was no application of any of the suggested screening and monitoring tools during Ms Foster's management. Urine drug screening is not available to Whitehorse physicians for outpatients. Ms. Foster was found deceased in her home on September 19, 2012 of a Mixed Drug Toxicity.

Significant Factors/Conclusions

There is a risk of overdose and/or toxicity in opioid medication use, particularly if the patient is not compliant, is taking more medication then prescribed, is combining medications with similar sedative or central nervous system/respiratory depressive effects, or if the patient has other medical issues.

Assessment and monitoring is standard in balancing the effectiveness of opioid pain management alongside the potential risk for negative effects such as toxicity.

Recommendations

No recommendations



Signature, Chief Coroner

Whitehorse, Yukon

Province/Territory

June 29, 2015

Date

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