



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

Department of Justice, Legal Services
Yukon Coroners Service
206C Lowe Street
PO Box 2703 (J-10A)
Y1A 2C6
Whitehorse, YT
Tel.: 867-667-5317 Fax.: 867-456-6826

Yukon Coroners Service: Judgement of Inquiry into the death of: Francis (Frank) Caouette

Coroner Investigative File No.: 4520201223

Name: Francis (Frank) Caouette Date of Birth: 1977/04/14 Date of Death: 2012/07/28
YYYY/MM/DD YYYY/MM/DD
Address: Carmacks, Yukon
Street Address Province/Territory Postal Code
Ethnic Origin: Caucasian Location of Death: John Connolly Campground, Faro, Yukon

Cause of Death

Mixed Drug Toxicity

Manner of Death

Accidental

Autopsy Findings

The body of Mr. Caouette was transported from Faro to Whitehorse, and on to Vancouver General Hospital, where an autopsy was performed. The autopsy was conducted by Dr. Carol Lee, Forensic Pathologist at Vancouver General Hospital on August 3, 2012.

According to the Pathologist, the autopsy showed a mildly enlarged heart (adjusted for body weight), with a thickened left ventricular wall (commonly associated with hypertension) and no evidence of acute injury. Foreign material with surrounding acute inflammatory reaction was within the tissue underneath the skin of the left wrist, which could be related to intravenous/subcutaneous injections.

Toxicological Findings

Elevated concentrations of hydromorphone and acetaminophen, with presence of multiple other medications including codeine, and clonazepam.

Circumstances of Death

Mr. Caouette had chronic pain and was being managed with prescription medications under the supervision of a physician. Mr. Caouette was a complex patient that required assessment, treatment, and monitoring to balance pain management with well documented aberrant prescription medication behaviors. In April 2011 and March 2012, Mr. Caouette was hospitalized for deliberate overdoses of prescription medications. Mr. Caouette had a history of multi-doctoring. He visited walk-in clinics, a community nursing station, other physicians, the emergency department and attended at more than one pharmacy. He exhibited drug-seeking behavior by requesting an increase in the dose of medication and for prescriptions to be filled early. Mr. Caouette would rotate the pharmacy each time he filled a prescription to avoid detection of early refills of narcotic medications.

Significant Factors/Conclusions

According to The Canadian Guidelines for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain, patients with a documented history of aberrant prescription medication behaviors and chronic pain require greater vigilance and the use of monitored prescribing practices. Mr. Caouette actively sought medications from various sources including walk-in clinics, a community nursing station, other physicians, emergency department and attended at more than one pharmacy. The only way for a family physician or another health professional in Yukon to confirm all the prescriptions written and dispensed for his/her patient is to call each of the pharmacies and request the information. Similarly, pharmacies are not able to view prescription history of a patient between pharmacies. The inability of pharmacies in Yukon to review the prescribing history and what medication had recently been dispensed created an environment for Mr. Caouette to obtain large quantities of medication without detection. A system linking physicians, pharmacies, hospitals, and nursing stations would augment patient care by providing a clear picture of medications that the patient has been prescribed and dispensed.

Recommendations

Department of Health and Social Services, Government of Yukon:

1. Review practices across Canadian jurisdictions and develop an appropriate and relevant Yukon prescription information system in which approved physicians and pharmacies can request and receive up to date records of medications dispensed to a patient, in a timely and secure manner. A Yukon prescription information system would strive to enhance patient care by providing complete, accurate, and comprehensive patient and drug information.

Chair, Yukon Medical Council:

2. Review the practice of triplicate prescriptions being directly provided to a patient by the physician. Consider requiring that triplicate prescriptions to be sent directly to the pharmacy.

MacDonald

Signature Chief Coroner

Whitehouse Yukon

Province/Territory

June 29, 2015

Date

Print

Save

Clear