

North Shore Schizophrenia Society

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 2009

North Shore Schizophrenia Society calls on VCHA for probe into faulty practices in Vancouver mental health services

A news conference on the tragic Marek Kwapiszewski case, with his sister Halina Haboosheh and NSSS president Herschel Hardin, will be held at the NSSS Family Support Centre this afternoon (Monday, June 29) at 1:30 p.m. Address: 205 - 1865 Marine Drive, West Vancouver. For other interview arrangements, please see the contact information, below.

The North Shore Schizophrenia Society is asking for a fundamental overhaul of senior mental health management in Vancouver, following a review of the suicide of Marek Kwapiszewski exactly a year ago today.

Kwapiszewski, who was seriously mentally ill, jumped off the Granville Street bridge to his death June 29, 2008 after repeated efforts by his sister Halina Haboosheh to get help for him were unsuccessful.

In the 20-month period from December 2006 through to her brother's death, Haboosheh, directly or through others, contacted Vancouver mental health services 16 different times, desperately trying to get them to intervene as her brother showed more and more troubling behavioural symptoms, but she was unable to get him into hospital and treatment.

The request for the management overhaul and for a "major cultural change" was sent Friday to Dr. David Ostrow, acting CEO of Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. It calls for an independent inquiry, under Ostrow's aegis, into the VCHA failure, expressing little confidence in mental health management addressing the failure, given their own responsibility for it.

At the heart of the Kwapiszewski tragedy was a disregard or ignorance of the Mental Health Act, with service providers in effect insisting he needed to be dangerous before he could be committed. The Act, however, allows for involuntary committal to "prevent the person's or patient's substantial mental or physical deterioration." Dangerousness isn't required. Indeed, the word itself isn't used in the relevant section of the Act.

In the end, of course, VCHA didn't protect Kwapiszewski from danger, either.

The use of the incorrect requirement for committal (dangerousness) rather than the actual leading criterion (to prevent substantial deterioration) is deeply ingrained in Vancouver mental health service's approach, the submission to Ostrow notes.

"It's such a deep-rooted fault and so very basic," says NSSS president Herschel Hardin, "that nothing short of a major cultural change, and what's required for such a change, is going to remedy the situation.

"Marek Kwapiszewski need not have died....should not have died."

The nine-page, 4,500 word, document now in Ostrow's hands analyzes the VCHA failure and provides a telling chronological account of Kwapiszewski's deterioration, Haboosheh's efforts to get him help, the system's failure to properly respond, and the final vortex of events leading to his death. Please see the attached. The document is also accessible on our website at www.northshoreschizophrenia.org/marek.pdf.

- 30 -

CONTACT:

Cheryl Olney, executive director at 604-926-0856 or

Herschel Hardin, president, 604-922-7153