



For immediate release

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NSSS asks for inquest into Ben Williams case

The North Shore Schizophrenia Society, in a letter to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia Diane Rotheron, has asked for an inquest into the death of Ben Williams of North Vancouver last December 22.

Mr. Williams, who suffered from schizophrenia, had a deteriorating heart condition which put him at grave risk. His symptoms were severe. Because of his mental illness, however, he didn't realize or acknowledge the danger he was in and refused all help. Mental Health Services, who could have taken him to hospital using the committal provision of the Mental Health Act, declined to do so, leaving him without help or treatment.

"He's going to die," his mother agonized at the time, which is inevitably what happened. He collapsed in the street from a heart attack December 22, and expired in Lions Gate Hospital Emergency.

In a statement today, NSSS president Herschel Hardin expressed dismay at what occurred. "The psychiatrist and nurse who visited him less than two weeks before his death apparently claimed there was nothing they could do, presumably because Mr. Williams wasn't floridly psychotic. The Mental Health Act, however, does allow for involuntary admission to hospital in order to prevent substantial physical deterioration, in the case of someone with a mental disorder. The provision is there for a reason. They ignored it.

"They also ignored another provision for committal: 'for the protection of the person.'

"They could, and should, have acted. You don't leave someone at that kind of risk when they want to live but can't grasp the danger they're in or address themselves to it."

Physical illness and risk for the mentally ill – their heightened vulnerability to heart attacks, strokes, pulmonary problems, and type 2 diabetes, known clinically as "metabolic syndrome" – is a matter of growing importance. The request for an inquest calls for, among other things, an examination of how urgent cases should be handled using the Mental Health Act and the Health Care (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act.

The full text of the letter to the chief coroner is available at www.northshoreschizophrenia.org/media.htm.

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