

Mental health nurse didn't believe Sally Mays intended to kill herself – inquest

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By Allison Coggan



DESPAIR: Sally Mays, 22, had a history of self-harming

A MENTAL health nurse refused to admit a woman to hospital the day before her death because he did not believe she was intending to kill herself.

Sally Mays, 22, asked to be taken to Mill View Court, an inpatient unit run by Humber Foundation Trust, because she feared she was in crisis.

Specialist nurse Christopher Hawes, who worked for the trust's crisis response team, assessed Sally at Hull Royal Infirmary after she took an overdose of tablets bought on the internet.

He said Sally became hostile, threatening to slit a police officer's throat, and he decided she should go home.

Mr Hawes told an inquest Sally "was unhappy about that decision" and walked out of the hospital, calling him "narcissistic".

The next day, Sally was found dead at her flat in west Hull.

Sally, who had emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD), had been told she would be admitted to hospital if she felt unable to keep herself safe when she was discharged from Mill View Court following a five-day stay, 15 days before her death.

In a written statement, consultant psychiatrist Dr Ravinda Mutha said: "Miss Mays was informed if the risk of overdose became significant, she would be offered admission on a short-term basis."

Sally was given a mental health assessment by Mr Hawes in the early hours of July 24, 2014, after police officers took her to Hull Royal.

He said: "She was orientated to time, place and person, her speech wasn't slurred and she was perfectly comprehensible throughout."

Mr Hawes said he decided Sally did not require inpatient treatment as she was seeing her community psychiatric nurse later that morning. She had also told him she had not intended to end her life with the overdose.

Under intense questioning from Bridget Dolan, representing Sally's family, Mr Hawes admitted parts of the risk assessment he had filled in about Sally and the risks she was facing contained information that was two years out of date.

While the form listed her frequency of self-harming as ten, the highest it could be, Mr Hawes told the inquest he should have revised it down to seven. Other parts of the form were also wrong, including the "potential lethality of self harm" which had been given as nine when Mr Hawes said it should also have been reduced.

"I'm very disappointed in myself that I didn't bring it down," said Mr Hawes.

Asked repeatedly by Ms Dolan if the risk assessment form he had filled in had been "good enough", he said: "Yes."

The inquest heard Sally took another overdose the next day and, this time, was taken to Miranda House. Again, she was refused admission and police officers took her back home to Derringham Court.

About two hours later, the emergency services found her dead in her home. A post mortem revealed she had died from mechanical asphyxia and overdose.

In the days leading up to her death, Sally had been asked to take part in a role-playing exercise to train final year student Leonie Naylor, despite her complex mental history.

Ms Naylor, then on placement from the University of Hull to the Haltemprice mental health team, said Sally told her she had taken an overdose during a phone call.

Ms Naylor alerted Sally's key worker Kerry Helyard and a short time later, Ms Helyard informed her Sally had not taken an overdose and did not require an ambulance.

Ms Naylor, who now works for Humber Foundation Trust, later heard the phone call had been "set up to test her skills" and she reported it to her student mentor.

She said staff on her university course often masqueraded as patients with mental health problems to test students' skills but role plays never involved patients.

Asked how she would feel if a member of staff had asked a patient to take part, Ms Naylor said: "I wouldn't be happy. It wouldn't be something that would sit well with me."

The inquest also heard Ms Naylor asked a member of staff at the university if she should tell the police about the role play but was told not to mention it in her statement.

The inquest is set to hear more about that conversation when it resumes today.