

Police accuse nurses of 'wanting to wash their hands of Sally Mays' – inquest

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By Allison Coggan



INQUIRY: A police officer told an inquest that nurses displayed 'arrogance and abruptness' in dealing with Sally Mays

A POLICE officer accused nurses of "washing their hands" of a woman in severe distress hours before she killed herself.

PC Neil Counter and PC Dennis Daughton were called to Miranda House after Sally Mays, 22, started banging her head on a wall because Humber NHS Foundation Trust's crisis team refused to admit her.

An inquest heard PC Counter had a "stand-up fight" in the car park outside the unit in Gladstone Street, west Hull, as he tried in vain to persuade trust staff Paddy McKee, Gemma Pearson and their manager Jon Paul Robinson to reconsider.

PC Counter said: "I think they wanted to wash their hands of her.

"They wanted her out of the building. In my opinion, it might have been because it was a Friday afternoon."

PC Counter said Mr McKee and Ms Pearson displayed "arrogance and abruptness" when he asked them to reconsider after Sally had told him: "As soon as I go home, I'm going to kill myself."

The inquest heard community psychiatric nurses Kerry Helyard, Laura Elliot and Andrew Laughton as well as psychotherapist Paul Fisher had all supported a hospital admission for Sally because of her worsening mental state.

Ms Elliot accompanied Sally to Miranda House just before 4pm on Friday, July 24, last year, and said Mr McKee and Ms Pearson told them: "There are no beds. We are not admitting her."

As well as hitting her head on the wall, Sally placed a ligature around her neck and was restrained on the floor by four members of staff.

PC Daughton said he and PC Counter tried to argue that attempt was further proof that it was not safe for Sally to go home.

However, he said Mr McKee told him: "It is one thing (to use a ligature) when you are on your own and another thing to do it when you are with other people."

A member of staff then came out of the room and told Mr McKee Sally could hear everything he was saying. "He simply shrugged his shoulders," PC Daughton said.

As Sally was already in a place not open to the public, the officers could not section Sally and agreed it would have been "ludicrous" to use that power when the crisis team had already ruled she would not be admitted.

Despite asking trust staff if anyone wanted to make a complaint so they could at least keep Sally in a cell for her own safety, they were told there were no grounds for her arrest.

"We had no choice but to remove her from the building and take her home," said PC Counter.

Just over two hours later, Sally was pronounced dead at her flat in west Hull.

PC Counter said: "When I think about Sally, I still feel very angry about the decision that was made. I think it was the wrong decision."

PC Daughton said: "At no point did we want to take Sally away from that place of safety. I would have stayed with her there all day if I could have.

"She had become an inconvenience. They just wanted her gone."

The inquest heard Jon Paul Robinson, then boss of the crisis team, had finished his shift and was heading back to Miranda House when he met PC Counter in the car park. He said he had relied on his staff's judgment and had not assessed Sally himself.

Mr Robinson said: "I would like to offer my condolences to the family and I'd also like to offer my apology.

"It feels like, on this occasion, I lacked clinical leadership and clinical inquiry. Sorry."

He agreed with Bridget Dolan, representing Sally's parents Angela and Andy, that it was "more probable than not" that Sally would not have killed herself if she had been admitted to the unit.

Comments reported

Charge nurse Paddy McKee told staff to let Sally Mays fall unconscious after she tied a ligature around her neck, the inquest heard.

Mr McKee was heard to say: "Leave her to faint. She will faint before she dies. We can take it off her then."

An internal investigation was launched after Mr McKee's comments were reported to the trust.

In response to questioning by Sally's brother Ben, Ms Elliot said: "I didn't feel she was treated with dignity and respect with that comment."

The inquiry continues.