

Ambulance took 99 minutes to reach Sally Mays after calling 999 threatening to kill herself – inquest

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By Allison Coggan



INQUIRY: Miranda House nurses Gemma Pearson and Paddy McKee arriving at Hull Coroners' Court. Inset, Sally Mays.

A WOMAN who called 999 threatening to kill herself was found dead after an ambulance took 99 minutes to reach her, an inquest heard.

Sally Mays, 22, called Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) at 5.35pm and an ambulance should have arrived at her west Hull flat within 30 minutes.

However, an inquest heard the first paramedic did not arrive until 7.14pm. By that time, Sally had stopped breathing and she was pronounced dead 30 minutes later.

Ben Holdaway, localities director at YAS, said: "The trust was experiencing high demand around the time of the call and was unable to allocate a resource."

The inquest heard Sally had called YAS three times on the day of her death because she felt she had been unable to get any help from Humber NHS Foundation Trust.

In her final minutes, she told the call handler: "My main problem is I just sort of feel suicidal. I feel totally hopeless. They told me they haven't got a bed."

After waiting on the phone for 13 minutes, Sally asked if she could put down the phone and the call was disconnected.

Sally's family only learned about the 99-minute delay from the Mail because YAS failed to inform them.

The inquest heard mental health nurse Gemma Pearson carried out a "gate-keeping assessment" along with charge nurse Paddy McKee at Miranda House to see whether Sally should be admitted to hospital.

They refused to admit her despite recommendations from three community psychiatric nurses and Sally's psychotherapist. Short-term admission was also recommended in Sally's care plan when she was at "significant risk".

Ms Pearson admitted she had failed in the "basics of psychiatric nursing" while assessing Sally.

Although she conceded a proper mental health assessment would take at least an hour, Ms Pearson agreed Sally was told within a very short space of time there was no bed for her.

Ms Pearson said: "From what Sally said to us, we couldn't see the need for an admission."

Bridget Dolan, representing Sally's parents Angela and Andy, listed checks including history, current symptoms and issues of concern, which should have formed part of the assessment.

She said to Ms Pearson: "You certainly didn't take the time to assess, even superficially, all of the things I have just listed."

The nurse conceded the assessment she and Mr McKee had carried out "should have been more in-depth".

The inquest heard Sally banged her head on a wall, attempted to strangle herself and warned she would kill herself as soon as she went home after she was refused admission.

Ms Dolan said: "She was saying, 'I need a bed, I can't cope. You are the gate-keeper. Please may I have a bed?'"

"She was, yes," Ms Pearson replied.

"Was there any more Sally could have done to explain how deeply she felt she needed a bed?" asked Ms Dolan.

"No," said Ms Pearson.

The nurse, who had 11 years' experience as a psychiatric nurse, admitted she should have carried out a re-evaluation after Sally harmed herself and declared her plan to kill herself.

Instead, staff at Humber Foundation Trust called police, who also attempted to persuade the crisis team to change their minds because they were so concerned about Sally.

Sally was found dead about two hours after she was taken home from Miranda House on Friday, July 25, 2014.

The inquest continues.

Alarm at Miranda House 'failed'

HUMBER NHS Foundation Trust was accused of a “lack of candour” after the inquest heard an emergency alarm at Miranda House had failed.

Nurse Gemma Pearson revealed she had told the trust the alarm had failed after Sally tried to harm herself.

However, Bridget Dolan, representing Sally’s parents, said it was the first they had heard about the problem, despite it being crucial to the inquest’s role in preventing future deaths.

She said: “We shouldn’t be discovering this at this stage. It is adding to the pain of the Mays that they have had to pull documents like pulling back teeth throughout this process.”

For the trust, Michael Rawlinson said it had tried to “strike a balance” between confidentiality in staff matters and providing documentation.