



Department of Health

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26 AUG 2014



Office of the Secretary

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Ms Kate Doherty
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Doherty

Re: Court Reference: COR 2011 000659 – PALMA CASTRO

Thank you for your letter of 20 May 2014 in relation to the coronial investigation into the death of Ms Palma Castro. The Department of Health (the Department) has reviewed the Coroner's findings and responds as follows:

Recommendation 1:

That the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist disseminates the lessons learnt from the Coroner's investigation.

Response:

The Office of the Chief Psychiatrist notes the lessons learnt by the Coroner in relation to the death of Ms Castro. Evidence and advice from coronial findings informs the development of guidelines which are produced by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist to advise service providers. These guidelines are being updated to reflect the recent commencement of the *Mental Health Act 2014*.

In 2010, the Department released a number of suicide risk assessment resources relevant to Ms Castro's case, including the '*Working with the suicidal person - Quick reference guide*', which emphasises the importance of engagement, risk assessment, obtaining collateral information, consultation with more experienced clinicians, documentation and consideration of hospitalisation. These resources can be accessed at the Department's website (<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/>).

Recommendation 2:

That the Department of Health and the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist consider the development of Psychiatric Emergency Care Centre (PECC) units to service patients in crisis in need of short-term admissions.

Response:

The Department recognises the importance of being able to meet the needs of patients in crisis who may benefit from short-term admissions. To address this need, funding has been provided to establish Psychiatric Assessment and Planning Units (PAPUs) within five public health services in Victoria, of which three are operational and two are currently being built.

PAPUs aim to ensure that people experiencing acute episodes of mental illness or disorder receive timely access to short-term (up to 72 hours) specialist psychiatric assessment and treatment where required and to minimise the need for an extended inpatient stay by ensuring that people can be supported adequately and appropriately in the community. This includes people at risk of self-harm or suicide who require urgent monitoring or short-term treatment.

PAPUs provide a similar function to that offered by Psychiatric Emergency Care Centres (PECC) in New South Wales and Queensland, and like PECCs, the models of care differ slightly between established PAPUs. A defining feature of PECCs is their co-location in the Emergency Department (ED) to support collaborative medical and psychiatric care processes, whereas PAPUs can be located either within the ED or the acute inpatient unit based on local needs of the service. Two PAPUs in Victoria are currently being established that are adjoined to health service EDs.

Yours sincerely



Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary