



VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC MEDICINE

26 May 2021

Ms Alex Cottrell
Principal Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank
Southbank VIC 3161
Via email:

Dear Ms Cottrell

Re: The death of Mr Daniel Frawley

I am writing in response to the findings and recommendations into the death of Mr Daniel Frawley.

Coroner Spanos found that it was most likely that Mr Frawley intentionally took his own life and that Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) was a potential contributor to the depression that Mr Frawley suffered in the years preceding and leading up to his death.

The coroner recommended that, in order to enhance research into CTE, the State Coroner and the Director of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, ensure that, as far as possible, coronial processes and practices:

- Recognise that currently, CTE can only be diagnosed at autopsy and requires a careful brain examination and sampling of the appropriate areas of the brain for histological and immunohistochemical assessment to determine whether the pathological changes ascribed to CTE are present.
- Improve timely identification of cases in which there is a history of head trauma, be that major trauma or minor repetitive trauma, such as may be sustained in sporting activities, so that consideration of the need for an autopsy can be appropriately informed.
- While brain examination and tissue sampling needs to be adequate for CTE assessment and this is ideally achieved by retention of the brain for examination in an appropriate centre, such as the Australian Sports Brain Bank, this option may not be acceptable to the senior next of kin. Therefore, a histological brain sampling protocol should be developed to ensure that appropriate sections are available to allow adequate assessment for the presence or absence of CTE changes without the need for long term retention of the whole brain.

The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) acknowledges that CTE can only be diagnosed at autopsy and requires careful examination of the brain with histological and immunohistochemical assessment. We also support the research of the Australian Sports Brain Bank (ASBB) to better understand the contribution of CTE to mental health.

The Coroners Admissions and Enquiries Office (CAE) will improve awareness among staff about ASBB and possible contribution of CTE to mental health. They will actively seek to identify cases by reviewing information in the police report of the death and medical records, and following discussions with families who have raised a history of multiple concussions in sport.

VIFM's Head, Forensic Pathology, is currently developing a histological brain sampling protocol in collaboration with the ASBB.

I accept all of the above recommendations and will continue to implement these recommendations in collaboration with the State Coroner.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Noel Woodford', with a small dot at the end.

Noel Woodford
Professor of Forensic Medicine, Monash University
Director, Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine