

Our Ref: 1161774

Your Ref: COR 2022 001265

22 April 2025

Ms Anna Pejnovic
Coroner's Solicitor
Legal Services
Coroners Court of Victoria

Email: [REDACTED]

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Dear Ms Pejnovic

Coronial Enquiry Request - (Deceased) William Gourley (10-OCT-1982)
COR 2022 001265

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We act on behalf of Latrobe Regional Health ('the Hospital').
- 1.2 We refer to the Findings of Coroner Jamieson delivered 10 January 2025 in relation to the death of William Thomas Gourley (**William**) (**the Findings**).
- 1.3 The Coroner made two recommendations for the Hospital, as follows:
- (a) *that **Latrobe Regional Health**, in consultation with the Victorian Network of Smokefree Health Services Guidance for Managing Nicotine Dependence & Withdrawal in Emergency Care Setting, implement a procedure specific to its emergency department regarding a patient's smoking status, and where clinically indicated, administer an assessment of nicotine dependence and provide appropriate Nicotine Replacement Therapy.*
 - (b) *that **Latrobe Regional Health** consider adopting William's matter as a case study to highlight the importance of a comprehensive triage and of staff responsibilities when identifying and escalating a patient's deterioration, and in circumstances of a patient's departure from the emergency department.*

2. Response to Recommendations

- 2.1 We are instructed that the Hospital response to the Recommendations is as follows:

Adelaide
Brisbane
Canberra
Darwin
Hobart
Melbourne
Norwest
Perth
Sydney

Latrobe Regional Health response to recommendations set out in the Findings of Coroner Jamieson delivered 10 January 2025 in relation to the death of William Thomas Gourley

Introduction

Latrobe Regional Health (**LRH**) extends its deepest condolences to William's family for their loss.

After William's passing, LRH conducted a Sentinel Event review with input from external experts. That review produced recommendations that have been adopted by LRH.

Coroner Jamieson's findings reference opinions expressed by the Coroners Prevention Unit (**CPU**). Her Honour's findings also indicate that the CPU 'identified other areas of concern' which 'had not been addressed' by LRH. LRH has not been given an opportunity to directly consider or address those concerns or opinions.

In responding to Her Honour's Recommendations, LRH would like to highlight that in February 2025, a new Alcohol and Other Drug Hub (**AOD Hub**) opened at LRH. The AOD Hub is a purpose-built unit adjacent to the Emergency Department. It allows expedited and enhanced assessment, interventions and care for consumers presenting with Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug concerns.

Recommendation 1

*'that **Latrobe Regional Health**, in consultation with the Victorian Network of Smokefree Health Services Guidance for Managing Nicotine Dependence & Withdrawal in Emergency Care Setting, implement a procedure specific to its emergency department regarding a patient's smoking status, and where clinically indicated, administer an assessment of nicotine dependence and provide appropriate Nicotine Replacement Therapy.'*

The LRH procedure relevant to Recommendation 1 is entitled 'Clinical Management of Nicotine Dependency among Patients Guideline' (**the Guideline**). The Guideline was introduced in 2019 and reviewed in 2023, partly in response to LRH's review of William's care and management.

The review amended the Guideline to include specific reference to the Emergency Department (**ED**). This approach was designed to reinforce the Guideline's application to include ED while adhering to the review recommendation that LRH's nicotine dependency protocols be consistent across the service.

LRH notes that the Guideline includes reference to specific obligations of Nurses and Midwives in the ED. The Guideline also sets out detailed information about Nicotine Replacement Therapy (**NRT**) prescribing, extensive information about nicotine interaction with other drugs and a practical guide to NRT administration.

The Guideline links to the following policies and protocols:

- (a) Smokefree policy

- (b) Medication Policy Mental Health – Use of Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) Protocol
- (c) Alcohol and Other Drug Withdrawal Management Protocol
- (d) Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drug Hub (MHAOD) Protocol

In addition to the policy review, LRH has updated its Electronic Medical Record (**EMR**) to include the Fagerström test as a risk screening tool embedded into the EMR. This means that when a patient presents to ED, the EMR prompts the health practitioner to ask the patient about their smoking or vaping status. If the patient gives a history of smoking or vaping, the Fagerström test is administered and the results recorded in the EMR. If the system registers a positive result for the Fagerström test, it automatically provides guidance as to the NRT dosage and combination therapy required to adequately manage that individual's nicotine withdrawal.

Recommendation 2

*'that **Latrobe Regional Health** consider adopting William's matter as a case study to highlight the importance of a comprehensive triage and of staff responsibilities when identifying and escalating a patient's deterioration, and in circumstances of a patient's departure from the emergency department.'*

The LRH Education and Training Unit (**ETU**) facilitates regular training on Nicotine Replacement Therapy (**NRT**) and use of the Fagerström Test. This NRT training occurs throughout the year and is delivered to nursing, midwifery and medical staff.

The NRT training is developed and delivered by an LRH Nurse Practitioner who specialises in drug and alcohol dependence.

William's matter (as a de-identified case study) and the issues identified in relation to his care have been incorporated into LRH's clinical training programs.

This training (which is currently being rolled out), includes triage responsibilities and requirements for escalation if a patient leaves ED prior to receiving treatment.

2.2 Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Yours faithfully



Sophie Pennington
Partner
HWL Ebsworth Lawyers

