

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Timothy Ralph, a prisoner at HMP Exeter, on 17 December 2019

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Our Vision

To carry out independent investigations to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

Our Values

We are:

Impartial: *we do not take sides*

Respectful: *we are considerate and courteous*

Inclusive: *we value diversity*

Dedicated: *we are determined and focused*

Fair: *we are honest and act with integrity*



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Summary

1. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman aims to make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision. One of the most important ways in which we work towards that aim is by carrying out **independent** investigations into deaths, due to any cause, of prisoners, young people in detention, residents of approved premises and detainees in immigration centres.
2. We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.
3. Mr Timothy Ralph, who was 57 years old, died of carcinomatosis (multiple cancers) and pulmonary small cell carcinoma (lung cancer) on 17 December 2019, at HMP Exeter. We offer our condolences to Mr Ralph's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the care Mr Ralph received at HMP Exeter was equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community. He did not make any recommendations.
5. We did not find any non-clinical issues of concern.

Investigation Process

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Ralph's clinical care at HMP Exeter.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Ralph's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. The PPO family liaison officer wrote to Mr Ralph's next of kin, his sister, to explain the investigation. She did not respond to our letter.

Previous deaths at Exeter

9. Mr Ralph was the 12th prisoner to die at Exeter in the last two years. Of these deaths, six were from natural causes, two were self-inflicted and three are currently awaiting classification.
10. There are no similarities between our findings in the investigation of Mr Ralph's death and the other deaths.

Key Events

11. On 29 September 2017, Mr Timothy Ralph was sentenced to four years and six months in prison for sexual offences. He was sent to HMP Winchester. On 7 November 2017, he was transferred to HMP Dartmoor.
12. Mr Ralph arrived into prison with a number of pre-existing medical conditions, including depression, anxiety, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), asthma, type 2 diabetes and back pain which were all managed with prescribed medications. Mr Ralph was reviewed regularly by healthcare staff and comprehensive care plans were devised to manage his treatment.
13. On 2 August 2018, Mr Ralph was reviewed by a prison nurse after he told her that he had been coughing up blood. She noted that he appeared to be extremely unwell. Following a review by a prison GP, Mr Ralph was taken to hospital by emergency ambulance. Mr Ralph was admitted to hospital as an inpatient. After treatment, he was discharged back to the prison on 21 August.
14. Tests carried out while in hospital showed that Mr Ralph had developed lung cancer. Hospital staff told him that without treatment he would have a prognosis of six weeks, but with palliative chemotherapy his prognosis would be anything up to six months. Mr Ralph chose to undergo treatment, which started in September.
15. On 29 August, an application for Mr Ralph's early release on compassionate grounds was submitted to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The application was refused because there was a lack of a definitive prognosis of three months or less, and that Mr Ralph had a history of repeated sexual offending.
16. In December, Mr Ralph said that he did not want anyone to resuscitate him if his heart or breathing stopped and signed an order to that effect. He was given a wristband to wear to ensure staff were aware of his wishes.
17. On 20 March 2019, Mr Ralph was admitted to hospital as an inpatient after healthcare staff noted that he had become increasingly confused. Following a series of tests, hospital staff told him that the cancer had spread to his brain and spine. Mr Ralph was discharged back to Dartmoor on 1 April. His care plans were updated and he was reviewed regularly by prison healthcare staff and the hospital.
18. On 28 November, Mr Ralph was transferred to the palliative care suite at HMP Exeter.
19. On 16 December, a prison GP reviewed Mr Ralph and noted that his condition had deteriorated significantly. The GP decided to send Mr Ralph to hospital for further review. However, when paramedics arrived to take him to hospital, they considered that he would not survive the journey to hospital. Prison healthcare staff made Mr Ralph comfortable and his family were informed.
20. Mr Ralph's condition continued to deteriorate and at 3.15am, on 17 December, healthcare staff noted that Mr Ralph had stopped breathing. They called an out of hours GP who confirmed Mr Ralph's death at 4.54am.

21. The coroner gave Mr Ralph's cause of death as carcinomatosis (multiple cancers) caused by pulmonary small cell carcinoma (lung cancer).

Lisa Burrell
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