

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Dennis Damon, a prisoner at HMP Stafford, on 16 January 2022

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 Dennis Damon died from a urinary tract infection in hospital on 16 January 2022 while a prisoner at HMP Stafford. He was also frail and had posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (a neurological disorder), both of which contributed to but did not cause his death. He was 81 years old. I offer my condolences to his family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care that Mr Damon received at Stafford was good and equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community.
5. However, the clinical reviewer found that when Mr Damon had his catheter changed on 22 December 2021, it was not fitted properly and he was admitted to hospital the next day with a low urine output, blood in his urine, abdominal pain, and a raised temperature.
6. The clinical reviewer has made two recommendations which are not directly related to Mr Damon's death but which the Head of Healthcare will need to address.

The Investigation Process

7. NHS England commissioned a clinical reviewer to review Mr Damon's clinical care at Stafford.
8. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Damon's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
9. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer wrote to Mr Damon's friend to explain our investigation. She did not respond.
10. We shared the initial report with the Prison Service. There were no factual inaccuracies.

Previous deaths at HMP Stafford

11. In the two years before Mr Damon's death, 14 prisoners died from natural causes, three as a result of COVID-19. There are no significant similarities between our findings in this investigation and those of the other deaths.

Key Events

12. On 24 May 2018, Mr Dennis Damon, was convicted of sex offences and was sentenced to 16 years in prison. On 26 April 2019, he was transferred to HMP Stafford.
13. Mr Damon had vascular dementia (decreased blood flow which damages brain tissue) and many pre-existing health conditions. Healthcare staff created care plans for dementia, blood pressure, kidney function, frailty and pressure sore areas. Mr Damon had daily social care and an assigned Dementia Nurse Specialist.
14. On 30 May 2021, Mr Damon went to hospital, where he had a catheter fitted. When he went back to Stafford, healthcare staff created a catheter care plan.
15. On 1 October, a dementia nurse specialist noted at a complex healthcare meeting that Mr Damon's cognition and mood were fluctuating because of his vascular dementia, and that his behaviour was challenging. She noted that this made it difficult at times for his carers to deliver the care that he needed. They thought that relocating him to a care home setting should be considered but felt that Mr Damon's health and social care needs were being met at Stafford.
16. On 19 October, an Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) reviewed Mr Damon because he was being more aggressive towards staff. A urine sample showed that he had a urinary infection, for which the ANP prescribed antibiotics.
17. On 23 December, a nurse saw Mr Damon, who had abdominal pain and a raised temperature. She found that he had only passed a small amount of urine and had blood in his catheter bag. She noted that Mr Damon's National Early Warning Score (NEWS, a tool to detect and respond to clinical deterioration) was 6 which indicated a high clinical risk. She radioed a medical emergency code blue (which indicates that a prisoner is unconscious or having difficulty breathing). Ambulance paramedics took Mr Damon to hospital. Hospital staff told an officer that his catheter was not properly fitted. They replaced his catheter and sent him back to Stafford.
18. On 28 December, a nurse went to Mr Damon's cell because a healthcare assistant radioed a medical emergency code blue. He saw that there was blood in Mr Damon's catheter bag, that he appeared agitated and that his skin felt hot. He noted that his NEWS was 5. Ambulance paramedics took Mr Damon to hospital, where hospital staff found that he had a chest and urine infection and treated him with intravenous antibiotics. On 4 January 2022, Mr Damon returned to Stafford with antibiotic tablets.
19. On 7 January, after Mr Damon's health deteriorated, prison staff held a multidisciplinary team meeting. A nurse noted that Mr Damon had prolonged periods of delirium. She noted that he needed increased social care and could be moved to the Special Care Unit (SCU) for safe 24-hour care. She referred him to the palliative care nurse, a social worker, and the primary care mental health team.
20. Later that day, the dementia nurse specialist spoke to a consultant psychiatrist, who said that Mr Damon's delirium could mean that he still had an infection and that he

should go back to hospital. The nurse sent him to hospital, where he died on 16 January.

Post-mortem report

21. There was no post-mortem examination. A hospital doctor established that Mr Damon died from a urinary tract infection. He was also frail and had posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (a neurological condition which can cause headaches, seizures, altered mental state and sight loss). These factors contributed to but did not cause his death.

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