

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Jan Slepčik, a prisoner at HMP Nottingham, on 10 February 2022

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Third Floor, 10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU

Email: mail@ppo.gov.uk
Web: www.ppo.gov.uk

T | 020 7633 4100



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 Jan Slepčik died in hospital on 10 February 2022 of cancer while a prisoner at HMP Nottingham. He was 71 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Slepčik's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Slepčik received at HMP Nottingham was of a variable standard. She considered that while there were some areas of his care that were equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community, there were other areas that were not. She was concerned that healthcare staff did not always use the National Early Warning Score (NEWS2, a tool to assess unwell patients) to assess Mr Slepčik as they should have done, the prison's interpreting service was not used consistently during clinical assessments and reviews, and written health information was not available in Mr Slepčik's first language. She has made two recommendations which we repeat below.
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern.

Recommendations

- The Head of Healthcare should ensure that healthcare staff use NEWS2 assessments consistently to identify and address clinical deterioration.
- The Governor and the Head of Healthcare should ensure that:
 - healthcare staff use the translation services for all clinical interactions
 - clinical and health information is written and made available in other languages where English is not the prisoner's first language; and
 - routinely monitor the access to translation services and escalate any issues to the provider's Quality and Safety/Governance team.

The Investigation Process

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Slepčik's clinical care at HMP Nottingham.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Slepčik's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.
9. The PPO's family liaison officer wrote to Mr Slepčik's next of kin, his partner, to explain the investigation. She did not reply to our letter.

Previous deaths at HMP Nottingham

10. Mr Slepčik was the seventh prisoner to die at Nottingham since February 2019. Of the previous deaths, five were from natural causes and one was a self-inflicted death.
11. In a previous investigation into the death of a prisoner at Nottingham in March 2020, we made a recommendation about the inconsistent use of the NEWS2 tool when reviewing prisoners. The prison accepted our recommendation and said that there would be a reflective discussion with healthcare staff about the importance of the use of the NEWS2 tool, and that clinical staff would be constantly reminded of the need to use the NEWS2 tool when carrying out clinical assessments of prisoners. It is disappointing that we are raising this issue again in this report.

Key Events

12. On 8 July 2021, Mr Jan Slepčík was remanded to HMP Nottingham charged with sexual offences. Mr Slepčík was a Slovakian national and spoke little English.
13. Mr Slepčík had several pre-existing medical conditions, including COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), diabetes, coronary heart disease and hypoglycaemia (a potentially dangerous reaction to low the blood sugar levels).
14. On his arrival at Nottingham, a nurse carried out his initial health screen. He noted that Mr Slepčík was a Slovakian national and spoke limited English. The nurse attempted to use the prison's translation service, but it was not available. Instead, he used Google Translate (a translation app) to assist him with the review.
15. The nurse noted Mr Slepčík's observations but did not use the NEWS2 tool (National Early Warning Score, a nationally recognised tool used to detect the deterioration and severity of a patient's condition) as he should have done. He created appropriate care plans to manage Mr Slepčík's care and referred him to the prison's long-term condition clinics.
16. On 12 July, a nurse saw Mr Slepčík and carried out full blood tests. The results showed that Mr Slepčík's kidneys were not functioning correctly. The nurse referred him to a prison GP for further review.
17. The next day, a prison GP reviewed the results of the blood tests. He repeated the blood tests, and the results were within a normal range. A month later, a specialist diabetes nurse saw Mr Slepčík and reviewed his medications and updated his diabetes care plan. Over the months that followed, healthcare staff reviewed him regularly.
18. On 17 November, Mr Slepčík was sentenced to 44 months in prison.

2022

19. On 30 January 2022, Mr Slepčík told prison staff that he felt unwell. A nurse saw him in his cell. He was unable to communicate with Mr Slepčík effectively because the prison's translation service was not available. He took Mr Slepčík's observations, and his respiratory rate and temperature were raised, his blood pressure was low, and his urine was extremely dark. He considered that Mr Slepčík might have developed a urinary tract infection, or he was dehydrated. He advised him to drink plenty of fluids and planned to review him the next day.
20. A prison paramedic carried out a follow up review the next day. Mr Slepčík's observations were abnormal. There was evidence of blood and very dark urine in his cell toilet. He was unable to fully understand what Mr Slepčík was saying because of the lack of translation support to assist him. He referred Mr Slepčík to a prison GP for further review.
21. On 1 February, a prison GP saw Mr Slepčík. He carried out a series of blood tests and sent the results to hospital for review. He considered that Mr Slepčík may have developed throat and stomach issues. The hospital reviewed the test results and instructed the prison to take Mr Slepčík to hospital immediately. The hospital

repeated the blood tests, but the results were normal, and they discharged Mr Slepčik back to the prison later that day.

22. On 2 February, a healthcare assistant saw Mr Slepčik. She noted that his toes were red and painful and that he said he was experiencing painful throbbing in his feet. She took a note of his observations and his oxygen saturation level was low. She asked the prison paramedic to carry out a further review.
23. The prison paramedic saw Mr Slepčik later that day. He noted that the upper right part of his abdomen was hard and painful and that there was again, evidence of blood in the toilet. He considered that Mr Slepčik needed to be reviewed urgently at hospital and was taken there by emergency ambulance.
24. Mr Slepčik was diagnosed with sepsis and was admitted to hospital as an inpatient.
25. Results of a CT (computerised tomography) scan showed that Mr Slepčik had developed bowel cancer, which had spread to other areas of his body. Hospital staff considered that palliative care was the only treatment option open to him.
26. At 8.45pm on 10 February, a hospital doctor confirmed that Mr Slepčik had died.

Post-mortem report

27. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Slepčik died of metastatic colonic carcinoma (cancer that has spread to other parts of the body). Ischaemic heart disease and diabetes were also listed as contributory factors.

Lisa Burrell
Assistant Ombudsman

December 2022

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