

Region, MDs sort out death details

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 trative officer (CAO) Dennis Perlin reported that an inquest may be called into the July 13 death of James Earl Scott, 84, at Guelph General Hospital.

Mr. Scott a resident at Cher's Rest Home, was in Guelph General for 13 days before he died of heart failure and pneumonia.

Halton public health staff and Guelph coroner Dr. Walter Scott (no relation) expressed concern because Scott had badly infected sores on the rear of his body when he was admitted to hospital, committee was told.

Dr. Peter Cole, Halton medical officer of health, said the severity of the decubitus ulcers, or bedsores, could not have happened between the time Dr. D.W. Van Der Bent, of Acton, treated Mr. Scott at the rest home and Scott's death at the hospital.

Mr. Scott was moribund since May, Mr. Perlin reported.

"The coroner (Dr. Scott) said he had never seen anything like it," Dr. Cole said. "The ulcers were right down to the bone. Our concern is because we didn't know about it. We're not saying Mrs. Cherwoniak didn't mean to provide proper care. When such things occur it's usually beyond the expertise of the average rest home operator to deal with it."

Public health staff view the situation seriously, Mr. Perlin said.

"(T)here was a need to question whether or not that particular individual was receiving proper care and treatment while in Cher's Rest Home," he stated in a report to the committee.

"... (S)taff believe the bedsores were probably from uncontrollable wetting and lack of changing because... the individual was fully dressed and up and around... when (public health nurses) visited the home. Somehow... (He) was not receiving proper care and got these terrible sores," Mr. Perlin added.

"Whether the individual finally died from the infectious sores is not the major concern here, but rather the particular incident just raise... concern as to whether the objective of Cher's Rest Home to provide proper care and treatment to the residents there is being achieved.

Dr. John Strathearn, regional coroner for South Georgian Bay region that includes Wellington County, said Tuesday that Dr. Scott recommended an inquest.

Dr. Cole said Dr. Van Der Bent had been treating Mr. Scott for the sores and rest home staff knew about them. Public health nurses were unaware of what was wrong when they recommended the man be removed from Cher's. The nurses noticed Scott's condition had deteriorated to a state where he required more care than the rest home is designed to provide.

When pressured by public health officials to place Mr. Scott in a different facility, Dr. Van Der Bent sent him to hospital, the committee was told.

"Dr. Van Der Bent is one physician who doesn't care much for the public health department," Dr. Cole said, "so his responses to staff queries were not particularly helpful."

Dr. Van Der Bent could not be contacted for comment.

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LEVELS

Because there is an attending physician doesn't absolve the home operator of responsibility for resident care, Dr. Cole said. Many physicians don't understand the distinction in the level of service offered by various facilities and they rely heavily on the health unit to aid in placing patients appropriately.

Dr. Van Der Bent also attends patients in two other Acton rest homes.

When a new rest home resident is accepted, public health staff is usually welcomed to interview the patients at the other Acton rest homes and determine whether they have been placed in an appropriate facility. This was not the case at Cher's, Dr. Cole said.

Sometimes, he said, the home operator can't assess the level of care needed by the patient. Other times, the patient is admitted properly but as his condition deteriorates he should be transferred to another type of facility.

COMMUNICATION
 Guelph lawyer Gerald Punnett, who represented Mrs. Cherwoniak and her

husband Brian at the meeting said he felt a breakdown of communication between health department staff and Mrs. Cherwoniak was responsible for lack of information surrounding Mr. Scott's condition.

Mr. Punnett said Dr. Cole's reports indicated things had been going well between the public health nurses visiting the home and his client. Dr. Cole said in a June 21 letter to Mr. Punnett that because he "had no reservations about the care provided at Cher's," the home would be included in the region's referral list for people making inquiries about placing a resident in a rest home.

However, when someone subsequently called the region looking for a list of homes to place a qualified resident, Cher's wasn't on the list.

Dr. Cole said he wasn't in possession of all the facts at the time he wrote the letter saying he had no concerns about care at

Cher's and it was "grossly inaccurate", to say relations between Mrs. Cherwoniak and her staff had been smooth and improving until recent months.

TEARS

Dr. Cole said during the past week three of his nurses have returned in tears from visits to the home. The nurses said they would not return because of the abuse they had experienced.

"They were totally unable to perform their job," he said, "not because they were not allowed to do so, but because of the atmosphere of total non-co-operation and total verbal abuse. From what I saw it appears the Cherwoniks were unwilling to co-operate that's one thing; but if they're unwilling to do so that's something else."

"It hasn't been a trouble free situation up until (regional council's) July 8 (meeting). I find it difficult to see how someone could forget how threatening they'd been to someone

as recently as July 8 — unless it was convenient to do so."

Mr. Punnett offered himself as a mediator to help re-establish relations between the Cherwoniks and regional health staff. He said his effort to halt unfounded allegations against the Cherwoniks has resulted in the launching of two slander suits against parties that he refused to name.

(It has been learned that one such action has been launched in the Wellington County sessions of the Ontario Supreme Court charging Margaret Willoughby, a member of the staff of the Milton-based Victorian Order of Nurses with slander).

ORDERED

Mr. Punnett said in a letter to Mr. Perlin dated July 6 that he felt his client

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