

YORK REGION

Coroner's inquest into death of Alzheimer patient hears testimony

BY MIKE ADLER
STAFF WRITER

Contractors at Maple Health Care Centre in Vaughan have had to wear name tags and sign safety agreements almost since the day Alzheimer patient Dorothy Gail Morphet escaped, employees told a coroner's inquest Monday.

Regan Dobie, who handles the centre's accounts, said the precautions started "quite immediately" after Morphet, 62, wandered from the York Region-run facility Feb. 10. Morphet was found dead the next day in a nearby field.

At the inquest's first day yesterday, facility maintenance worker James Martin said that on Feb. 10 he took a contractor up to the roof of the centre, which had opened the month before.

Soon after Morphet was found, York Regional Police speculated she had been able to escape because a 2 p.m. fire alarm had opened magnetic locks on the doors.

Police have also stated one of the facility's security cameras taped Morphet leaving the building.

But Martin said staff members, according to plan, had positioned themselves at all the unlocked doors

while he reset each of the locks.

He said while reactivating a lock he saw that Morphet, a patient admitted on Jan. 21 to the facility's first-floor secured wing, was still inside the building and a staff member was with her.

"I was well aware that Gail could move quickly, that sometimes she would run through the hallways," Martin said.

The inquest, held at the Markham civic centre by Coroner Dr. Bernie Gordon, is intended to find how Morphet died and what led directly to her death.

The three-man, two-women coroner's jury can't make a criminal finding on the death, but it can make recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future.

Barbara Aabo, a part-time receptionist and clerk who works near the facility's front entrance, said family members, residents which are allowed to leave, friends, volunteers and other people visit the facility.

She said only contractors are issued name tags and made to sign and date a "safety guidelines" form that includes a promise not to leave locked doors unsecured.

The inquest continues today.



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