

12 November 2010

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2010

**SOME PRISONER DEATHS FROM HEART ATTACKS PREVENTABLE  
WITH BETTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE, SAYS OMBUDSMAN**

Prison staff must respond better to medical emergencies to prevent some prisoners dying from heart disease, said Jane Webb, Acting Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, publishing a report into deaths from circulatory diseases.

The report, *Learning from PPO Investigations: Circulatory Diseases*, summarises 115 investigations into prisoner deaths due to heart-related conditions that occurred between January 2007 and December 2009. The average age of these prisoners was 53 years old, with 30 per cent younger than 45 years.

Frequent problems in the investigations studied were staff responses to chest pain, a common symptom of a heart attack, and emergency response in the prison setting. Where the deaths occurred in prison (and not in an NHS hospital), the emergency response could have been better in nearly half of all cases. Concerns centred on delays in entering cells to provide treatment, delays in calling ambulances and a shortage of staff with emergency first aid training.

The report also found that:

- of those prisoners who died due to coronary heart disease or heart attacks, nearly half had no diagnosis of heart disease or other heart conditions prior to death;
- where heart disease or risk of its development was diagnosed, serious concerns over the clinical care provided were found in 21 per cent of cases (ten of 48). On at least two of these occasions reviewers reported that lapses in care may have led to death; and
- where no heart disease or risk of its development was diagnosed, serious concerns over the clinical care provided were identified in 29 per cent of cases (ten of 34). Again, on at least two of these occasions reviewers reported that that lapses in care may have led to death.

The report recommends joint review of existing protocols between Primary Care Trusts, prisons, local cardiology services and local ambulance services, and further provision of emergency first aid training for front-line staff. With current Prison Service guidance on deaths in custody focused on self-inflicted deaths, the report continues to recommend new or amended policy with a greater focus on deaths from natural causes more broadly. The Department of Health is reminding prison Governors to talk to their local ambulance service as a result of the findings.

Jane Webb said:

“While the difficulty responding to medical emergencies in custodial settings is acknowledged, we continue to identify areas where performance could be improved. This report highlights areas where Prison Service guidance on deaths in custody could be developed or amended. A greater emphasis on medical emergencies and deaths from natural causes more broadly would be beneficial.”

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **The report:** A digital copy of the report can be found on our website. Visit [www.ppo.gov.uk](http://www.ppo.gov.uk).
2. **Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's (PPO) office:** The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) office investigate deaths that occur in prison, immigration detention or amongst the residents of probation approved premises.
3. **Investigation reports:** The PPO's investigation reports are issued to the bereaved families, to HM Coroners, to the services in remit, and to the relevant Primary Care Trust. Anonymised versions of the reports are put on the PPO website after the inquest. This report is based on 115 investigation reports into prisoner deaths due to heart-related conditions that occurred between January 2007 and December 2009.
4. **Contact us:** Please contact Jane Parsons, PPO Press Office, on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1415 Monday to Friday if you would like more information or to request an interview with Jane Webb. Ries-William Lamont, PPO Communications Manager, T: 0207 035 2038 E: [ries-william.lamont@ppo.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ries-william.lamont@ppo.gsi.gov.uk) can provide further information and hardcopies of the report. Alternatively please send requests or feedback to Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's Office, Ashley House, 2 Monck Street, London, SW1P 2BQ.