



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the death of James Geoffrey Griffin,

Find, pursuant to Section 28 (1) of the Coroners Act 1995, that:

- a) The identity of the deceased is James Geoffrey Griffin;
- b) Mr Griffin died as a result of a self-inflicted overdose of prescription medication;
- c) The cause of Mr Griffin's death was mixed drug toxicity; and
- d) Mr Griffin died on 18 October 2019 at the Launceston General Hospital, Launceston, Tasmania.

Introduction

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Mr Griffin's death. That evidence includes:

- Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- The opinion of the pathologist who conducted the autopsy;
- The results of toxicological analysis of *ante mortem* samples of blood;
- An affidavit of Mr Griffin's son;
- Relevant affidavits of investigating police officers and other witnesses;
- Tasmania Police Prosecution Brief;
- Medical records and reports; and
- Forensic evidence.

Background

Mr Griffin was born in Deloraine on 14 August 1950. He was aged 69 years, had married and separated twice, had had four children and lived alone at Legana at the time of his death.

Mr Griffin worked as a registered nurse during his life including on the Spirit of Tasmania, Ashley Detention Centre and the Paediatric Centre at the Launceston General Hospital. As a result of his employment with children he was required to acquire a Working with Vulnerable Persons accreditation which he first did so on 20 June 2016.

Mr Griffin was a type 2 diabetic and suffered the effects of a degenerative spinal injury. He was prescribed medication for pain relief with endone, sleep assist with oxycodone and anti-inflammatory agent, celebrax. He last visited his general practitioner on 5 August 2019 where he was prescribed temazepam to assist with sleep.

On 1 May 2019, an adult female made a complaint to Tasmania Police of historic sexual abuse by Mr Griffin. The abuse commenced when she was 11 years of age and he was 58. An investigation followed. Mr Griffin was formally interviewed. During that interview, after caution, he made admissions that he had met the child through a local sporting group where he had acted as a masseuse. He also made admissions of criminal sexual misconduct in relation to her.

On 31 July 2019, Mr Griffin's Working with Vulnerable Persons accreditation was suspended.

On 3 September 2019, he was charged with a number of criminal offences involving repeated sexual abuse of a child.

By October 2019, four other females had come forward and made similar historic complaints of sexual abuse ranging from the late 1980s through to 2012.

Police searched Mr Griffin's home and located a significant amount of child exploitation material, (downloaded from the internet), as well as self-generated images of a young female family member. Additional evidence was located of internet chat sites where Mr Griffin spoke to others and bragged of using anti-histamines to sedate the female family member and some of her friends when they slept over, in order to sexually abuse them.

Mr Griffin was arrested again on 3 October 2019 and charged with additional sexual crimes.

Mr Griffin's electronic devices were seized by police and subsequent forensic analysis showed they contained indecent images of a work colleague's child, as well as indecent images of children apparently taken in his role as a paediatric nurse. At the time of his death, Mr Griffin had not been interviewed by police in relation to these matters.

Circumstances Surrounding the Death

On 13 October 2019, Mr Griffin contacted his son, who as a result went to his father's home. The pair spoke and Mr Griffin asked his son for his support.

After his son left, Mr Griffin texted him asking him to check on him if he did not 'message' him.

The following day Mr Griffin's son went back to his father's house and found him in a chair in the combined lounge/dining room. Mr Griffin was unresponsive and had discharge from his mouth. Tasmania Ambulance took him to the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) where he was admitted.

He did not regain consciousness and died on 18 October 2019.

Investigation

After formal identification, the body was transferred to the mortuary at the LGH. On 22 October 2019, a pathologist, Dr Terry Brain conducted an autopsy on the body. He found no anatomical cause of death and no signs of injury.

Toxicological analysis of *ante mortem* blood (i.e. blood taken when Mr Griffin was admitted to hospital) indicate that he had taken a fatal dose of oxycodone (1.1mg/L). In addition, a greater than therapeutic level of doxylamine, as well as temazepam and naloxone were found to have been present in the samples.

Tasmania Police attended Mr Griffin's house after his death and observed paperwork and bills organised on his dining room table, as if he was putting his affairs in order, family photo albums and sealed letters addressed to family members.

The sealed envelopes contained cash, presumably gifts for members of the family.

Other letters were requests and directions associated with the administration of his estate.

In the kitchen bin, Police located numerous empty medication packets.

While he was under investigation for sexually abusing children Mr Griffin spoke to one of the complainants. He said to her, words to the effect, that he would not be going to jail and would commit suicide before he did.

The evidence viewed as a whole satisfies me to the requisite legal standard that the cause of Mr Griffin's death was mixed prescription drug intoxication which caused hypoxia. I am satisfied that there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding Mr Griffin's death and that when he took the drugs which caused his death he did so with the express intention of ending his own life, voluntarily and alone. No doubt the charges he was facing at the time of his death motivated his action.

Comments and Recommendations

The circumstances of Mr Griffin's death do not require me to make any comments or recommendations pursuant to section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

Dated: 18 May 2020 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

Simon Cooper
CORONER