

S.C. County Clears Jail in Death of Inmate

By The State

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A mentally ill Richland County, S.C., jail inmate found in his cell with profound hypothermia was given adequate care during his incarceration and no one did anything wrong, county officials said last week.

But Assistant County Administrator Milton Pope, breaking a three-day silence, couldn't explain how Bobby Ray Mott became hypothermic. 'That's a medical issue,' he said.

But county Coroner Gary Watts told Mott's daughter, Bobbie Mott Coward, he can't explain how her father became hypothermic.

Pope said jail administrators completed an internal investigation, but he would not provide a copy of the report. No employee was reprimanded or fired, he said.

The investigation was done 'to make sure detention officers followed normal operating procedure during Mr. Mott's detention,' Pope said.

Jail employees and medical staff routinely checked on Mott several times a day between Dec. 31 and Jan. 15, when he was taken to Palmetto Health Richland, Pope said.

The findings in the report are consistent with those of a sheriff's investigation, Pope said. Sheriff's spokesman Joseph Pellicci has said deputies found no criminal wrongdoing in Mott's care. But Pellicci said deputies have not completed their investigation. He declined to provide a copy of the investigation because the case is open.

Mott died Jan. 22, a week after he was found in his cell naked and unresponsive after a shower, the coroner's office has said. His body temperature was 79 degrees Fahrenheit, about 20 degrees below normal.

Mott bled to death after receiving treatment for a week at Palmetto Health Richland, Watts said.

But after a month long investigation, Watts doesn't know what caused Mott's hypothermia or how long it took to set in.

Pope said jail employees knew Mott was mentally ill when he arrived at the jail Dec. 31 after being arrested in Forest Acres on charges of assault and writing several fraudulent checks. On Jan. 6, jail officials called the state Department of Mental Health to schedule an evaluation for Mott after he was unruly at a bond hearing. An evaluation was scheduled for Jan. 16, Pope said, but Mott was hospitalized Jan. 15.

Mott died of internal bleeding on the 22nd after a stent - a piece of wire mesh used to open arteries - was removed from his left leg, Watts said. A nurse found Mott unresponsive shortly after the stents were removed, Watts said.

Watts ruled that 'profound hypothermia' contributed to Mott's accidental death. 'Although he died of the bleed-out .'. he wouldn't have been in the hospital had he not been hypothermic,' Watts said.