

DEATH IN CUSTODY OF HJA

SUMMARY

Pursuant to the provisions of *California Penal Code* §919(b) the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) is vested with the discretionary authority to, “inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county”. In exercising that authority, the Jury historically has determined to review the circumstances surrounding inmate deaths occurring while they were in the custody of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department. This Activity Report addresses the Jury’s inquiry into the death of one such inmate, HJA, who suffered from multiple chronic medical conditions and died at Cottage Hospital I in March 2018. Based upon its review, the Jury has concluded that HJA’s death was attributable to natural causes and no further action is required.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

In 2017, HJA, a 60-year-old homeless male, was booked into the Santa Barbara County Jail (Main Jail). HJA’s medical history revealed a veritable plethora of serious ailments, HJA had been incarcerated in the Main Jail on several occasions prior to May 2017, during which periods he often was non-compliant with his plan of care.

In early March 2018, after a custody deputy delivering HJA’s breakfast found the inmate lying on the floor of his cell, he was taken by ambulance to Cottage Hospital where he expired the following day.

During its investigation the Jury reviewed jail and medical records to familiarize itself with HJA’s incarceration history. Specifically, the Jury learned HJA was discovered lying naked and unconscious on the floor of his isolation cell by a custody deputy who was delivering his breakfast tray. Present in the cell were two untouched dinner trays and one untouched breakfast tray indicating that HJA had not eaten for nearly two days. Medical staff quickly were notified, and a nurse practitioner summoned to the scene tried but was unable to obtain a “good” blood pressure reading. HJA was carried from his cell and transported him to Cottage Hospital.

He was then transferred to “comfort care” having previously executed a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) request at the Main Jail. HJA’s critical medical condition continued to decline rapidly and he passed away. An autopsy and toxicological tests later revealed that no foul play or trauma caused or contributed to HJA’s death and that it was due to natural causes.

CONCLUSION

The Jury has concluded from its inquiry into the circumstances surrounding HJA’s death in custody that all pertinent health rules, regulations, and policies were followed by the Sheriff’s Department and that no further action is required. Accordingly, pursuant to *California Penal Code* §933.05, this report does not require an agency response.