

No extra training following death of Indigenous man hogtied at Adelaide prison, coroner hears

Wayne Fella Morrison had no criminal convictions and died three days after being restrained and taken to high security area



Staff at Adelaide's Yatala Labour Prison say they 'felt abandoned by management' the day Wayne Fella was restrained and became non-responsive, inquest hears.

Royce Kurmelovs

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A South Australian prison officer has denied directing other staff to destroy records, during evidence to an inquest into the death in custody of Wayne Fella Morrison – the first hearing to be held in two years.

The coroner resumed hearing evidence on Tuesday five years after the death of Morrison, a 29-year-old Wiradjuri, Kokatha and Wirangu man who died on 26 September 2016 at the Royal Adelaide hospital.

Morrison had no criminal convictions and was not identified as Indigenous or at risk when he was admitted.

After an incident, up to 14 corrections officers wrestled Morrison to the ground outside his cell. Morrison was then hogtied, placed in a spit hood and carried to a prison van for transport to G Division, the high security area of the prison.

When he was removed, Morrison was non-responsive and it took two-and-a-half minutes for anyone to begin CPR.

He died at the Royal Adelaide hospital three days later.

No video footage exists to show what took place in the back of the van.

Corrections officer Shirley Bell told the inquest on Tuesday that staff at Yatala Labour Prison – where Morrison was being held on remand before his death – have not received any additional training since the incident.

“The only thing they’ve brought up is CRD training, which is how to take a prisoner down,” Bell said. “That was a little bit of a kneejerk reaction – or I thought it was – other than that, nothing.”

Bell said there had been other incidents at the prison since Morrison’s death and prison management had not acted to address longstanding issues raised by staff.

This included a reliance on undertrained and unqualified junior staff to handle admissions as they were paid less than senior staff or those who had undergone further training.

“It’s about the money,” Bell said. “You lost a whole lot of experienced staff that were trained to do admits because management would pay them at a CO2 level.”

Since Morrison’s death, the Adelaide Remand Centre has been privatised and now handles the majority of admissions.

Earlier in the day, corrections officer Michael Penn faced questions about his actions on the day of Morrison’s death as the court sought to establish a clear timeline of events.

Of particular interest was a call Penn made seeking legal advice as part of his role on the executive committee of the prison officer’s legal fund and when he gave a direction to another prison officer to stop uploading incident reports.

Under questioning by Claire O’Connor, representing Morrison’s family, Penn said he had only told other prison officers to stop uploading the reports once he had received legal advice and said he had not instructed anyone to destroy reports.

Penn also said he “felt bullied” in response to questions about prison management.

“I feel bullied into saying something that should have been protected by legal professional privilege,” Penn said, adding that he felt prison management abandoned staff on the day.

“Where was management? Why didn’t they hunt me down if there was this problem? Where were they? Where were they hiding?” Penn said.

Questions about training, process and who did what on the day are relevant to the circumstances of Morrison’s death.

There have been seven Indigenous deaths in custody in the past two months, with two of those having been confirmed in the last two days.