Man falsely accused of sex attack hangs himself after police fail to tell him case had been dropped

By DAILY MAIL REPORTER
UPDATED: 11:59, 16 April 2010

A man who was falsely accused of sexual assault hanged himself after police failed to tell him they had dropped the case, an inquest heard.

John Keogh, 23, was ‘very upset and angry’ after a hospital patient claimed he had indecently assaulted her.

An investigation was launched but police decided to drop the case and withdraw all charges after interviewing him.
However, officers did not plan to tell Mr Keogh – who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia when he was 18 - until four days later – by which time, he had hanged himself with a pair of shoelaces.

His family believe he would not have killed himself if police had told him that he was no longer a suspect.

At jury inquest held in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, which returned a narrative verdict, the delay was described as a ‘contributing factor’ to Mr Keogh’s death.

The chair juror said: ‘He took his life by hanging, however, we feel that a failure to recognise the risk of this happening to him, particularly subsequent to the police interview may have been a contributing factor.’

Speaking after the inquest, Mr Keogh’s brother, Christopher, 34, from Trowbridge, slammed police as ‘negligent’.

He said: ‘There was a lot of crying down the phone about what had been allegedly done. He was crying that he didn't do anything. He was very angry.

‘There should have been more communication between the police and mental health partnership.

‘The system just failed him. They were negligent. If John had been told the allegations had been dropped I don't think we would be here today.

‘I feel there was a total lack of communication. I hope some recommendations come along so that this type of thing doesn't happen again.’

Mr Keogh, who had ambitions to become a landscape gardener, lived alone in a flat in Trowbridge.

However, he was moved to Fountain Way Mental Health Hospital in Salisbury, in June 2008 after being accused of sexually assaulting a female patient at Green Lane Hospital in Devizes.

Wiltshire Police interviewed Mr Keogh on July 1, 2009 and decided to drop the case against him on July 4.

Officers immediately informed the complainant but did not plan to tell Mr Keogh until July 7.

However, he was found hanged at 3.40am on July 7, in the bathroom of his bedroom at the hospital.
Former Wiltshire Police investigator Christopher Bazire, who dealt with the case, told the inquest he would have informed Mr Keogh sooner had he known about the extent of his fragile mental state.

He said: ‘I wanted to spend some time talking to him and telling him what had happened. It felt right and proper that he should be given the results back on the ward.’

Mr Keogh’s mother Margaret Keogh, 56, from Trowbridge, was too upset to attend the inquest but believes her son would ‘still be alive’ if police had told him sooner.

She said: ‘I feel really angry that they have failed my son. I knew when he called me the night before he died, when he kept saying “goodbye, mum”, I knew that was it.

‘I 100 per cent believe if he was told the allegations had been dropped on the Friday there would not have been an inquest.

‘He may still be ill but he would be alive.’

Wiltshire Coroner David Ridley told the inquest he will be writing a report criticising the lack of communication between police and hospital workers.

A spokesman for Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership said they will ‘consider and reflect’ upon his concerns.

He said: ‘While disappointed at the inquest's findings, we will reflect upon the coroner's letter on receipt and will respond to him accordingly.

‘We will continue to support John's mother. We offer his family and friends our sincere condolences.’

Under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, victims have the right to be told when a case is dropped but there is no such legislation for informing suspects.

Detective Superintendent Sarah Bodell, head of Wiltshire Police's public protection department, pledged to review this system.

She said: ‘We recognise that there is no national policy about informing suspects but there is for keeping victims up to date. This is something we have already chosen to review.’