

HONOLULU ADVERTISER

Posted on: Tuesday, January 3, 2006

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Associated Press

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They said Ah Mau had told an inmate on Friday that she couldn't catch her breath. She was hospitalized, but died on Saturday, according to family members.

Ah Mau had been at the prison for 13 years. She was convicted in 1993 of murder for beating her 18-month-old son and denying him medical care that could have saved his life.

Ah Mau pleaded not guilty and would have been up for parole next summer.

HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN

Tuesday, January 3, 2006

Isle prisoner's death in Kentucky spurs probe

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Report on Sarah Ah Mau's Death & Wilma Kawakami's Hospitalization
Kat Brady, Community Alliance on Prisons
Tuesday, January 3, 2006

Saturday, December 31, 2005:

I received a call from a former inmate, I shall call her DL, who was contacted by a Hawai'i inmate at Otter Creek Correctional Facility in Wheelwright, KY. Hawai'i inmate, Sarah Ah Mau died on Saturday, December 31, 2005. According to DL, Sarah had been complaining of stomach pains for the last 4 weeks. After going to medical, she was given water pills and a laxative (the papers report that it was castor oil). On Thursday night, Sarah dragged herself to another inmate's room and begged this inmate to intervene on her behalf to get medical help. This inmate called a guard and Sarah was rushed to the hospital.

DL also told me that another Hawai'i inmate was taken to the hospital and had to undergo heart by-pass surgery after repeatedly complaining about leg pains.

A few hours later, I received another call from the mother of a Hawai'i Otter Creek inmate who related a similar story but added that Sarah had been on prescription medication, but has been denied this medication since she arrived at Otter Creek. This woman also said that when Sarah was brought to the hospital, she was on life-support for 1-1/2 days. She said that neither Otter Creek nor Hawai'i called Sarah's family to report that she was in the hospital.

Tuesday, January 3, 2006:

I received a call from an inmate at Otter Creek this morning. This inmate is the one who got Sarah medical help. Sarah body was swelling and she was in pain, but despite her efforts to see an outside doctor, she was threatened with lockdown (administrative segregation) if she continued complaining.

On **Thursday, December 29th** Sarah went to this inmate's room and pleaded for help. Sarah's body was swollen and her feet were so swollen that they looked deformed. This inmate gave Sarah saimin and took her back to her room, rounding up blankets so that Sarah's feet could be elevated. This inmate then went 'downstairs to get a guard' and asked the officer to look at Sarah. When the Officer Johnson opened the door and looked at Sarah she was shocked when she saw Sarah's condition. Officer Johnson then called for medical help and a wheelchair was brought for Sarah. Sarah was scared and asked the other inmate to go with her to the hospital. This was not allowed. This inmate is still haunted by the look that Sarah gave her when she was denied accompanying her to the hospital. She is the last person who saw Sarah alive.

Sarah was admitted to the hospital, I assume it was Hazard Regional Medical Center since that is the closest hospital, and immediately put on life-support. On Thursday night, another inmate who went to school was Sarah called her sister to tell her that Sarah was in the hospital. Neither Public Safety nor Otter Creek called her family. **On Friday, December 30, 2005**, the family was advised by Wes Mun, Medical Administrator at PSD, that Sarah was on life support at the hospital. *It is unclear who originated that call PSD or the family.*

On **Saturday, December 31, 2005**, Sarah Ah Mau died.

The other inmate, Wilma Kawakami was sent to the hospital, again I assume it was Hazard Regional Medical Center, on **Tuesday, December 27, 2005**. Wilma had been complaining of chest pains and pains in her leg, arm

and back. She could barely walk, according to the caller who walked with her around the prison yard almost daily. Wilma was treated by the medical staff at the prison for asthma. By the time Wilma got to the hospital, she needed heart by-pass surgery.

The Director of Security, Ms. Hodge, wanted to put Wilma in lockdown (administrative segregation) because it was a 'sterile environment.' *How could that be when the women in lockdown only get 3 showers a week?*

On **Monday, January 2, 2006**, Wilma was returned to Otter Creek. The caller reported that Wilma is now back in the hospital, as they saw her being brought out of the prison in a wheelchair. A subsequent call I received said that Wilma was back at Otter Creek for 3 hours before being sent back to the hospital.

The women are scared and constantly threatened with lockdown if they ask questions. According to the caller, an interim contract was signed with Otter Creek by Hawai'i and it calls for an on-site monitor, *I have not seen this contract or the finalized version, despite promises by the director.*

Otter Creek is doing major damage control now. On Saturday, December 31st after Sarah died, Ms. Hodges, Chief of Security assembled the Hawai'i women to control the story. "It's kind of like breaking your leg and going to the hospital, but you die from something else." *What???? How insensitive can someone be? One of their sisters died and many of the women have medical problems. This speech did nothing to allay their fears, it only served to increase them and highlight the inhumane treatment and insensitivity of the staff at Otter Creek.*

There was a memorial for Sarah at Otter Creek today, Tuesday, January 3rd. Hawai'i inmates were allowed to attend, but Kentucky inmates who knew Sarah and wanted to say goodbye were denied access.

MY CONCLUSIONS:

1. **BRING OUR WOMEN HOME.** Use the tax revenue to create more gender responsive community-based programs that would better serve most of the women. Our women are not safe at Otter Creek. The medical care is inadequate at best. There is no infirmary at the prison. See additional report following regarding Rowena Robinson, who had to be rushed to the hospital suffering from pneumonia, but was diagnosed by Otter Creek as having a sinus infection.
2. Authorize a community advocate to travel with the team going to Otter Creek to provide some community oversight. Our PSD seems to be bamboozled by CCA and Otter Creek. The Medical Director spoke to me about Rowena Robinson and he was looking at her medical file received from Otter Creek as we spoke. The file as he described it to me appears to have been whitewashed. He told me that there was a note in the file that she should be checked by the prison medical staff within 90 days. He emphasized that there was no follow up appointment scheduled. Not at all what Rowena explained to me. I just got off the phone with Rowena and she told me that she received a letter from the surgeon who operated on her, Dr. Koura, saying that she missed her December 8th appointment. One doesn't have to go to medical school to know that a follow up appointment is protocol after surgery. I called the doctor's office twice and confirmed that she had a follow up appointment on December 8th, yet the prison records show no follow up appointment was scheduled and that she had a sinus infection. I am awaiting a copy of this letter from Rowena.
3. Since the women arrived at Otter Creek most have had severe diarrhea and vomiting. I am currently investigating where the prison's water comes from. Before our women were sent there I heard reports that there was e-coli in the water. I have heard subsequent reports from a nurse who works at another prison in KY that Otter Creek's water comes from an abandoned mine shaft. I wrote all this to Frank Lopez in August and ask that PSD ensure the safety of the water, and he has assured me that they have checked the water and there is no problem.
4. Upon arrival the women who had prescription medication were denied their meds. One woman's blood

pressure was 192/120 and she passed out. She got her blood pressure meds, although it took 5-6 days for her to get them. Some of the women never got their prescription meds.

5. The women were limited in what they could bring with them from Brush, CO, although I am told there are not similar restrictions for the men. I spoke with PSD, Ed Shimoda, about this because some of the women have expensive law books they wanted to ship. They were told that they had to send them to their families instead. Families cannot send these books to inmates, since inmates can only receive books directly from the publisher. PSD did NOTHING to help the women. Today I received a call from a family member who said that Brush prison did ship the women's belongings, but Otter Creek refused the shipment. The women were forced to buy toiletries and other needs at the commissary.
6. The women are awakened in the middle of the night for various things - going to the medical unit, meetings with staff, shopping at the commissary, etc. This seems most unusual to me (and to the women as well).
7. Although they were promised thermal underwear, jackets and warm clothing, they were each issued a jacket. It is really cold there and in order to go to meals or to get their medication, they must stand out in the freezing cold for 45 minutes or more. The women have had to sleep in almost all their clothes because they are freezing and the blankets issued are inadequate. Another broken promise.
8. There is a problem with the HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) system and the women have told me there is no heat in some of the cells, yet the walls in some of their rooms have been 'sweating' with cold water running down into their bunks.
9. The cells are bunk beds and the prison has displayed total disregard for the women's safety. There are no ladders to get to the upper bunk, there are no safety guards to prevent a woman from falling out, and they have assigned women to the top bunks with total disregard of their medical conditions. One woman with leg problems could not get up to her bunk. Another woman who weighs 300 pounds could not even get up to the bunk. They are not allowed to switch bunks they are assigned to and they have had to fashion steps with books and boxes. A sure safety violation.
10. Two or three Hawai'i women are in lockdown and their Legal Aid attorney has been denied admittance to see them. Interestingly, the Legal Aid representative for the Kentucky women had no problem gaining entry. The case against the Hawai'i inmates was dismissed since they had no access to legal counsel.

How many women have to die before Hawai'i realizes that turning our people over to the lowest bidder is not always the best solution? These women are serving their sentences, but they are human beings. This is shameful and another black eye for Hawai'i. Three serious medical cases mis-diagnosed. One woman dead.

Some Questions:

- Did we do proper due diligence before sending out women to Otter Creek?
- What kind of investigation and assurances did Hawai'i receive that the water was safe?
- What kind of assurances did we get that the staff was properly trained and professional?
- With a number of women in various stages of menopause and with health problems, did we thoroughly investigate the medical unit?