



State of Utah

GARY R. HERBERT
Governor

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Lieutenant Governor

Utah Department of Corrections

Executive Office

ROLLIN COOK
Executive Director

BROOKE ADAMS
Public Information Officer

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Contact: Brooke Adams, Public Information Officer
801-545-5536 (o)
801-560-7608 (c)
brookeadams@utah.gov

Update on April 5 inmate death investigation

Three additional employees have been placed on administrative leave based on preliminary findings of two separate investigations authorized by the Utah Department of Corrections into the April 5 death of a Utah State Prison inmate.

The Medical Examiner's Office has not yet completed its autopsy report on Ramon C. Estrada, 62.

The Department's preliminary internal review indicates that the failure to provide Estrada with dialysis at the prison's on-site clinic could be a contributing factor in his death.

South Valley Dialysis, overseen by University of Utah Health Care, operates the dialysis clinic at the prison.

The Department employees placed on leave worked for the prison's Clinical Services Bureau and were on duty between April 3 and April 5, when, due to a scheduling error, technicians for South Valley Dialysis failed to show up to treat seven inmates, including Estrada. The status of the Department employees is still under review and their names will not be released.

The Department placed the Clinical Services Bureau director on administrative leave immediately following Estrada's death. The director remains on leave at this time pending the outcome of the ongoing reviews.

In late April, the Department retained WELLCON, a nationally recognized corrections healthcare consulting firm based in Utah, to conduct an outside review of Estrada's death, the prison's dialysis program, the overall healthcare delivery system at the prison as it relates to dialysis patients, mental health issues, and to make recommendations on how to improve these health services.

Dr. Todd Wilcox, founder of WELLCON, has worked as a physician in jail and prison settings for 18 years. He is the medical director of the Salt Lake County Jail system and is a nationally recognized corrections health care consultant.

WELLCON contracted Mark Ellsworth, a registered nurse and health care administrator with more than 29 years experience, including bedside care and emergency and correctional patient care, to assist in its review. Ellsworth has worked as director of nursing and health care administrator for large prison and jail systems and as a health care consultant on projects that include correctional facilities.

In addition to the WELLCON review, the Department's Law Enforcement Bureau is engaged in an extensive internal investigation into the events leading up to Estrada's death.

Both the WELLCON and Law Enforcement Bureau draft reports will undergo an independent review by the Utah Department of Health before being finalized.

The Department implemented several measures immediately following Estrada's death to improve communication with and oversight of the dialysis contract provider.

Since then, the Department and South Valley Dialysis have added additional measures to improve care and tracking of inmates receiving dialysis. These include provision of weekly summary sheets of inmate dialysis treatment; a procedure for monitoring and tracking inmates who refuse or stop scheduled dialysis treatment; sharing of treatment protocols and notes/orders between the Department and South Valley Dialysis; holding quality assurance protocol reviews every six months; and mandatory joint training of Department and South Valley Dialysis staff who work in the Olympus Facility (where the dialysis clinic is located).

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