

Details of new evidence emerge as second Sally Mays inquest opens

The previous inquest in 2015 into the tragic Hull woman's death was quashed by the High Court

By James Campbell Reporter 05:00, 27 SEP 2022 Updated 13:30, 28 SEP 2022



Sally Mays took her own life after she was turned away by Humber NHS Foundation Trust's crisis team. (Image: Angela Mays)

An "upset" staff member confided in a colleague in the car park of a mental health unit shortly after Sally Mays was turned away, an inquest heard.

Sally, 22, who had mental health issues, died at home in Hull in 2014 shortly after she was refused a bed at Miranda House in Hull. Her parents Angela and Andy have fought for the last eight years for improvements to be made and lessons to be learnt from Sally's death.

Sally took her own life on July 25, 2014 after two nurses from Humber NHS Foundation Trust's crisis team – Paddy McKee and Gemma Pearson - refused to admit her to hospital following a 14-minute assessment at Miranda House despite being a suicide risk.

An eight-day inquest in 2015 heard Sally, who had emotionally unstable personality disorder, died from an overdose and mechanical asphyxia after Yorkshire Ambulance Service took 99 minutes to reach her west Hull flat – they should have been there within 30 minutes.

In December 2021 the High Court in London ordered a new inquest into her death after a conversation between consultant psychiatrist Dr Kwame Opoku-Fofie and community

psychiatric nurse Laura Elliot was never disclosed. No statement by Dr Opoku-Fofie was submitted at the original inquest and he was not called as a witness.

The new inquest opened on Monday and the first witness to give evidence was Deborah Barrett, a mental health nurse, who carried out a HR investigation on behalf of the Humber NHS Foundation Trust. The investigation was prompted by the alarming nature of the findings following a serious incident review.

Now retired, Ms Barrett told the inquest she was in contact with Laura Elliot, who had been on leave for some time, in relation to her return to work. During a meeting in October 2015, just days after the inquest into Sally's death had been concluded, Ms Barrett explained how Ms Elliot provided "new information".



Sally Mays took her own life after she was turned away by Humber NHS Foundation Trust's crisis team. Sally as a teenager (Image: Angela Mays)

Ms Barrett said: "Laura told me that on the day Sally had been to Miranda House - shortly before her death – she (Ms Elliot) was walking across the car park and was clearly upset. She said she saw Dr Opaku-Fofie who asked her what was wrong and she told him what had happened with Sally.

“He told her everything would be alright and Sally would either settle down or she would be able to access services at the weekend. I realised this was new information and I did not know about this. I did not ask further questions as I did not feel it was my place to do so.”

Ms Barrett also told the inquest Ms Elliot was concerned bringing up the conversation she had with Dr Opoku-Fofie at that late stage “might not be helpful” which is why it was not raised. But Ms Barrett said she felt it was necessary to escalate the new information to senior management.

Ms Barrett also interviewed Dr Opoku-Fofie as part of the HR investigation. She said he told her he did not recollect being involved in Sally’s care on July 25.

Bridget Dolan KC had argued at the High Court in December 2021 that the conversation between Dr Opoku and Ms Elliot on the day she died was "knowingly withheld" from the original inquest in October 2015. She said the discussion revealed "a clear opportunity" to reverse the decision not to admit Sally.



Sally Mays took her own life after she was turned away by Humber NHS Foundation Trust’s crisis team. Sally dressed for her prom (Image: Angela Mays)

Following Sally's death, a police investigation into possible corporate manslaughter and other offences was launched but resulted in no charges.

However, McKee was struck off by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) earlier this year following a Fitness to Practice hearing. McKee was employed in the crisis service of the Humber NHS Foundation Trust at the time he dealt with Sally.

After a 12-day hearing, all 30 charges against McKee were proved along with six aggravating factors while all mitigation was dismissed. The report by the NMC condemned the actions of McKee stating "he treated her in a way that lacked basic kindness and compassion". The NMC found his actions to refuse Sally admission contributed to her death.

The inquest in Hull in 2015 heard Sally asked to be admitted to hospital as her mental health deteriorated in the last few days of her life. Three nurses from her community team and her psychotherapist recommended a short stay in hospital in line with her care plan.

However, nurses McKee and Pearson refused to admit her after carrying out what Professor Marks described as a "lamentable" assessment. Instead, they called police when Sally started banging her head off a wall and tried to strangle herself in her distress.



Disgraced mental health nurse Paddy McKee

However, police officers knew Sally needed to be in hospital to keep her safe and had a "stand-up fight" with the two nurses outside Miranda House to persuade them to change their minds. But they were forced to take Sally home when the nurses refused to reconsider.

Prof Paul Marks said the decision not to admit Ms Mays constituted "neglect" which bore "a direct causal relationship to her death later that evening". He said that she had been admitted following an initial assessment she "would have survived and not died when she did".

A further missed opportunity to save her life came from the 69-minute delay to an ambulance arriving at Sally's flat after her 999 call was not categorised appropriately, the coroner said. Following the inquest in 2015, coroner Prof Marks ruled the failure to admit Sally to hospital was neglect and said: "For the avoidance of doubt, had Sally been admitted, she would not have died that day."

On Monday, he read his findings of fact from the previous inquest into evidence, including the conclusion. But he will now have to come to a new conclusion after the High Court quashed the original one from 2015. The inquest continues.