

Sprague inquest adjourned indefinitely

What happens when there's a death in a jail cell in Dufferin County? If the November 2010 death of Adam Sprague, 25, is typical, there would be an investigation by the provincial Special Investigation Unit followed by Police Services Act disciplining of one or more officers and, most likely, changes made to how cells are monitored.

And then, three years later, there would be the mandatory coroner's inquest. At that late date, the inquest would be likely to hear only a rehash of commonly known information as the SIU would have left no stone unturned in its investigation.

And the parents and loved ones of the deceased would be forced to relive the horrors of the death for a third time.

And, as appears to have happened at the Sprague inquest, the coroner and the jury would be searching for new information on which to make recommendations ? which is a principal part of their job.

Dufferin County has holding cells at three locations: the OPP detachment at Primrose; the Shelburne Police Department; and the Orangeville police station where Mr. Sprague died on Remembrance Day 2010.

Whatever the eventual inquest recommendations are, they would apply not only to those three locations but also to every police service in Ontario.

It's not known when the Sprague inquest will wrap up. It got under way a week ago Wednesday and stood down Friday with the expectation that it would resume by Tuesday. Now, according to Hamilton Crown Attorney Karen Shea, who acts as counsel to the supervising coroner for the Central West Region, it will be recalled after there has been a meeting in the near future.

On recommendations, it is expected that the jury would call for more frequent monitoring of cells along with a definition of what is expected of the monitor.

Apart from the inquest, there have been suggestions that police need to be taught to distinguish between intoxication by alcohol and by narcotics.

In the case at hand, Mr. Sprague was found to have been unlawfully arrested for intoxication in a public place while he was in the garage of a private residence.

The autopsy revealed that he died of an oxycodone overdose. One published report said that there was an absence of alcohol in his blood.

By Wes Keller