

# Tragic Story of Violet Arrow

## Plus Gross Negligence of Alaska Native Med. Center

By MARGIE BAUMAN

ANCHORAGE — A coroner's jury in Anchorage has blamed negligence in diagnosis and negligence in providing care for the April 5 death of Violet Arrow at the Alaska Native Medical Center.

The jury report came down to Coroner Ronnie Bray April 25, after ten persons testified earlier in a coroner's inquest called after protests were made about Mrs. Arrow's death.

Further action on the case will be in the hands of U.S. Attorney G. Kent Edwards. The District Attorney's office in Anchorage said Monday that it is currently conducting investigations to determine whether there is any evidence to justify criminal proceedings.

A group calling itself the Public Health Survivors Committee met with Edwards on

Thursday to discuss the filing of a civil suit against the Health Service.

Survivors Committee began the protest shortly after the death occurred, charging that Mrs. Arrow was refused admittance to the ANMC three times before being admitted to the hospital, where she died one hour later.

The jury had first found that Mrs. Arrow died of pneumonia and that a person or persons unknown may have committed a crime in connection with the death. But Bray said there was a contradiction between the jury verdict of a natural death (pneumonia) and the contention that a crime may have been committed.

The jury reconvened the following morning and found negligence to be the cause of death.

Dr. Robert Tank, a pathologist

who performed the autopsy on Mrs. Arrow for the ANMC, testified before the coroner's jury that pneumonia, complicated by a blood clot on the lungs, a broken hip, damaged liver and multiple bruises to the face, arms and legs were evident from his autopsy.

Tank said pneumonia appeared to be the major cause of death, complicated by the embolism in the lungs, the fracture and liver damage, the latter due to alcohol.

The pathologist also found evidence of bronchitis, fibrosis of the lungs and calcium deposits caused by an old case of tuberculosis and an injured right eye, for which Mrs. Arrow was treated the night of April 4.

Dr. Michael Emmick, a physician who saw Mrs. Arrow in the outpatient department of ANMC, said he felt at the time "that her primary problem was post-alcohol. I felt she was ill because of withdrawal."

Emmick said he noted from hospital records that Mrs. Arrow was treated the night of April 4 for the eye injury and other minor injuries (possibly inflicted in a beating earlier that week) and then transferred to the Social Development Center (SDC) detoxification facilities.

Emmick said when he saw Mrs. Arrow the next morning she appeared lucid, even "joking to some extent." Emmick said when he asked her what she was doing there she replied "nothing wrong; if I had a drink, I'd be all right."

The physician said he conducted a thorough neurological examination, but judged her not to need hospitalization.

Emmick noted that Mrs. Arrow underwent surgery in October of 1972 for a blood clot on the brain and the possible connection between that and the seizures which she suf-

# Violet Arrow's Death . .

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ferred several times the day of her death. Emmick said those convulsions were aggravated by alcohol and withdrawal.

Emmick said Mrs. Arrow received medication, but when put into a stretcher to await transportation back to the SDC, she climbed off and walked out twice.

She also climbed out of a wheel chair she was placed in, and stretched out on the floor, Emmick said. Finally, he added, he told nurses to leave her alone, just to stick a pillow under her head on the floor.

If Emmick wanted Mrs. Arrow returned to the SDC, the SDC did NOT. Several employees of the SDC gave lengthy testimony stating that Mrs. Arrow was obviously in need, in their opinion, of medical treatment rather than detoxification.

Emmick said that when Mrs. Arrow was returned to the ANMC he called the SDC to say he felt the problem was alcoholic withdrawal.

Dr. F. J. Phillips, called by SDC, examined Violet Arrow, noted she had "a flail left leg (obviously broken) a hoarse rattle in her lungs, she was coughing up thick sputum, and she was very disoriented."

"It was my opinion," said Dr. Phillips, "that she was a medical case. I thought there was a good indication that she needed intensive medical care. I thought she had pneumonia."

He typed a memo which was given to the ambulance driver but ANMC officials say they never received the memo and it cannot now be located.

Emmick went off duty, but was alerted by another physician when she was brought in, apparently in much worse condition than when first seen at the hospital. The doctor said he was "very shocked" the next day to learn that she had died.

Dr. Robert Fortune, director of the ANMC, said he had no personal, direct knowledge of the case, but that he did review it. Fortune said that as Mrs. Arrow's condition appeared worse, Dr. Emmick had made arrangement for her admission and asked to be kept notified of the case.

Ms. Strauss, SDC's registered nurse, testified that the borough ambulance, the Red Wagon, took more than an hour to arrive to take Mrs. Arrow back to the hospital; (this for the fourth visit to the hospital within 24 hours.)

Fortune countered later that the Red Wagon had NOT been called on an emergency basis.

But perhaps the most extraordinary testimony of all came from Samuel Pedro, a driver for the ANMC.

Pedro testified that he went to the outpatient department of the medical center the afternoon of April 5 to pick up Mrs. Arrow and return her to the SDC. Pedro said she was unable to walk at that time; that she was lying on the floor with the pillow under her head.

Pedro said his orders were to return her and an intoxicated man to their respective residences. However, the intoxicated man fell asleep in the back

seat of the medical center car and efforts to move him to the front seat failed, Pedro said. So Mrs. Arrow was put in the front seat, half on her knees, for the trip.

Then, Pedro testified, he couldn't find the SDC and had to ask security police in the area where it was. "It was quite a lot of time before I got there," he said.

Pedro said SDC personnel seemed surprised that Mrs. Arrow had been returned and told him to take her back. He took her back, but now hospital personnel told him there was a mixup.

Pedro was told to wait around, but he was tired of waiting, he said, so he drove back to the front part of the hospital.

"Nobody came out to see her" from the outpatient department the second time around and nobody asked why she was there again, he said.

After about 30 minutes, Pedro said, the orders came to take her back to SDC.

Pedro said Mrs. Arrow only spoke to him twice in the two hours she was in the car; "once she asked me to see her daughter (a patient at the ANMC) and once if she could open the window."

When the ordeal of Mrs. Arrow began, nobody is sure, but according to the observations of nurse Jean Strauss, she was incapacitated and in great pain when she was returned to the SDC the afternoon of April 5, about 2:24 p.m.

So Mrs. Arrow was returned to the medical center. When she was returned at 4:30 p.m. to SDC "it took four people to carry her in from the car," Mrs. Strauss said.

"About 5 p.m. she had another seizure and the Red Wagon was called. It arrived at 7 p.m. to take Mrs. Arrow to the hospital. At last, she was admitted. Then she was dead.