



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
TENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT, COLORADO  
J.E. CHOSTNER  
District Attorney

November 10, 2015

Sheriff Kirk Taylor  
909 Court Street  
Pueblo County Sheriff's Office  
Pueblo, CO 81003

Re: District Attorney CIT Decision Letter  
Death in Pueblo County Detention Facility  
Deceased: Susan Antonia Cordova, DOB: 07/31/62  
Date of Death: 04/25/14

Dear Sheriff Taylor:

The Tenth Judicial District Critical Incident Team Protocol is invoked in the event of a custodial death. Susan Antonia Cordova died in the Pueblo County Detention Facility on 04/25/14. Accordingly, a Critical Incident Team was organized to investigate the incident. The Pueblo Police Department was designated the lead investigative agency to coordinate the investigation. Participants in the investigation were the Pueblo Police Department, Pueblo County Sheriff's Department, Pueblo County Coroner, and pathologist Dr. Michael Burson. The Team submitted its Executive Summary and Investigative Reports to the District Attorney for review. This letter contains my decision pursuant to the provisions of the Critical Incident Team Protocol.

### **Summary of Incident**

Susan Antonia Cordova was arrested for DUI on April 11, 2014 and booked into jail (Pueblo County Detention Facility). On April 25 she was seen unresponsive lying in her bunk on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, C wing of the jail at 2:07 pm. Deputy Deanna Cook had previously spoken to Ms. Cordova the same day at approximately 12:30 pm. She was housed with 51 other female inmates on that wing. Medical staff and AMR (American Medical Response) was contacted and asked to respond. Medical staff began medical procedures to revive her. After AMR arrived their personnel commenced Advanced Life Support protocol. After 20 minutes of these procedures there was still no sign of life and death was declared.

## **Interviews with Jail Staff**

Deputy Deanna Cook reported that she had spoken to Ms. Cordova several times on April 25<sup>th</sup> and she had inquired about becoming a trustee. Cook picked up food trays about 12:00 pm to 12:15 pm and she spoke to Ms Cordova then. It appeared she had eaten her food. The only thing Cook noticed that was different was that Cordova's face appeared jaundiced, but she was not complaining about any medical issues or feeling badly. Shortly after 2:00 pm Cook heard inmates banging on the door and they were pointing to Cordova's location. Her face was blue and cold and Cook checked for a pulse but found none. Medical staff was called and AMR was notified. Efforts to revive Ms. Cordova were unsuccessful. After 20 minutes of Advanced Life Support procedures and still no sign of life, the death of Ms. Cordova was declared by AMR personnel. Ms. Cordova was transported to Parkview Medical Center.

## **Interviews with Medical Personnel**

Physician's Assistant Jennifer Ziegler was interviewed. She was called to respond to Ms. Cordova's situation. When she arrived a nurse was doing CPR on Cordova. They worked on the patient until AMR arrived and took over. She did not observe any injuries to Cordova. She did observe that her abdomen was distended and she was blue around her lips and hands. Ziegler reported that she ordered an assessment on Cordova on April 22 because a nurse reported that deputies thought that Cordova looked yellow. Cordova reported that she was not feeling pain and was feeling fine. Nonetheless, Ziegler wrote an order for them to obtain labs for liver, kidney, and electrolytes. Ziegler said that she received the results of the labs about an hour and a half before the call for medical help on April 24<sup>th</sup>, but they had been reviewed by an EMT the night before. The labs showed a few abnormalities, but nothing so abnormal that hospitalization would be warranted. Her liver enzymes were a little high which indicates the jaundice appearance. Ziegler ordered a multivitamin to try to get her lab numbers back up and planned to recheck them in a week. Cordova had other medical problems including high blood pressure and COPD. She was not aware of the patient making any medical complaints at the time.

## **Interviews with Inmates**

Numerous female inmates that were housed with Ms. Cordova were interviewed. None of them saw any foul play with regard to Ms. Cordova. Many of them were aware that Cordova had health issues and was on prescriptions. Many reported that she had been coughing since she was incarcerated. Many of them complained about medical services and believed that Ms. Cordova may not have getting all of her medications. Some believed Ms. Cordova kept notes or a ledger of when she received, or did not receive, her medications. Based on that information, police officers and sheriff deputies searched the entire wing but they found no such notes or ledgers.

## **Investigation and Autopsy**

After Ms. Cordova was transported to Parkview Medical Center an investigative exam was done by Deputy Coroner Ron Ivan and Police Sergeant Kenneth Espinoza to determine if she had any injuries consistent with an assault or other type of foul play. The body appeared to be jaundiced, but there was no evidence of injury or criminal assault.

An autopsy was performed on Susan Cordova by Dr. Michael Burson on April 26, 2014. Dr. Burson's reported a diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver with a history of chronic ethanol abuse. The cause of death was determined to be complications of chronic ethanol abuse. The manner of death was determined to be natural.

## Conclusion

A review of the CIT Executive Summary and the Investigative Reports reveal no evidence of assault or any other criminal activity. Neither investigators, nor the deputy coroner, nor the pathologist who conducted the autopsy found external injuries. Ms. Cordova had several medical conditions upon admission to jail. The cause of death was determined to be complications of chronic ethanol abuse and the manner of death to be natural. There is no evidence of criminal wrongdoing and no criminal charges are warranted.



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J. E. Chostner  
District Attorney

Pc:

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