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Calls for help went ignored as Bronzefield prisoner suffered cardiac arrest in cell, inquest rules

An inmate's calls for help were ignored as she suffered a cardiac arrest in her prison cell at HMP Bronzefield, an inquest has ruled. Natasha Chin, 39, was found unresponsive in her cell in July 2016, less than 36 hours after entering the Sodexo-run prison in Ashford. Following an inquest at Woking Coroner's Court, which concluded in December, a jury found that neglect and systemic failures by prison and healthcare providers contributed to her death. Particularly, they found that the prison's healthcare staff failed to monitor her adequately or ensure she had essential medication. The medical cause of death was given as cardiac arrest and was related to the effects of vomiting, alongside chronic alcohol and drug dependence. Ms Chin, an Islington woman with a history of poor health, told prison staff that she felt unwell upon arrival at HMP Bronzefield. She was subsequently placed in the prison's specialist drug and alcohol wing. On the morning of her death, Ms Chin's condition deteriorated and she began to vomit profusely for several hours. However, she did not collect the essential medication that was prescribed to her. Healthcare staff at the prison failed to follow up to understand why she had not collected her medication, and did not ensure that she got it. HMP Bronzefield is operated by Sodexo and is the only purpose-built private prison solely for women in the UK (Image: TMS) They also failed to respond to a prison officer's requests to attend her cell or monitor her vomiting. The inquest heard that Ms Chin rung her cell bell in an attempt to call for help but received no response as staff were unaware that the cell bells were faulty. Experts told the inquest that if Ms Chin's condition had been properly monitored and responded to, her vomiting would have been less severe. The jury heard that if she continued to vomit after receiving medication, she would have then been transferred to hospital and it is likely that she would have survived. After hearing three weeks of evidence, the jury concluded that her death was caused "by a systemic failure through poor governance which led to a lack of basic care" and that the death was "contributed to by neglect". Marsha Chin said she was shocked to learn that her sister's death could have been avoided. "On behalf of Natasha's family I would like to thank the coroner and the jury for their thorough and careful consideration of all the evidence surrounding Natasha's death and her treatment in HMP Bronzefield," she said in a statement. "As a family we have been shocked to learn of the inadequacies of the care provided to her and the fact that prison staff and management could have prevented her untimely death. "We can only hope that changes are now made to try to ensure no other family has to lose a loved one in such circumstances." Deborah Coles, the director of charity Inquest, has called for Sodexo to take urgent action to prevent further deaths in women's prisons. Since Ms Chin's death in 2016, there have been three further deaths of women found unresponsive in cells at HMP Bronzefield, which is the only purpose-built private women's prison in the UK. "Sodexo and the Ministry of Justice must be held to account for their failure to act upon repeated warnings about unsafe healthcare practices in Bronzefield," Ms Coles said. "Natasha's death was a result of this indifference and neglect. It is shameful that women continue to die such needless deaths in prison. "Despite this they failed to provide Natasha with even a basic duty of care. "Urgent action is needed to dismantle failing women's prisons and invest this money, not in private companies but in specialist women's services to support women in the community."