



Man Dies After Alleged Denial of HIV Meds

Lawsuit claims he didn't receive treatment for two months.

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A California inmate with HIV died after allegedly being denied antiretroviral medication prescribed by his doctors and then contracting a preventable viral infection. The man's family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the county and its health care contractor, claiming they failed to provide the man's lifesaving treatment.

In February 2022, Nicholas Overfield, 38, was arrested for failing to appear in court. During his arrest, he informed officers of his HIV-positive status and need for antiretroviral medication to maintain his health. Overfield's mother, Lesley Overfield, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, reportedly gave her son's prescribed antiretrovirals to officers, who took the meds with them, CBS News reports.

Just two months later, Lesley visited her son in jail and found that his health had declined to the extent that he was too weak to walk and had to use a wheelchair. The next day, Overfield was rushed to the hospital; he was transferred to hospice care soon thereafter.

"Medical records show that he was denied his prescribed HIV medication for the entire two months he was detained," the lawsuit alleges.

Overfield died on June 21, 2022. According to the lawsuit, his death certificate stated that the immediate cause of death was varicella zoster virus encephalitis. Varicella zoster virus generally shows up as chickenpox or a painful rash known as shingles, but it can infect and damage the central nervous system and cause encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. Overfield allegedly contracted the virus two months prior to his death—meaning while he was incarcerated—according to court documents.

The lawsuit filed on January 16 in U.S. District Court names as defendants the County of El Dorado and Wellpath Community Care, the jail's health care contractor.

"Wellpath has a well-documented history of providing shockingly inadequate medical 'care' in jails and prisons across the country," the lawsuit states.
