



### **G87 Near Miss Incidents in Police Custody Suites in London, UK: A One Year Prospective Study**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to identify detainees at higher risk of harm while in police custody.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by reducing harm to detainees.

**Background:** Every year a number of deaths will occur in police custody within the UK. Potentially preventable deaths in police custody include those that involve illicit drugs, alcohol and deliberate self-harm. This study examined near miss incidents (NMI) that did not result in death in order to develop a better understanding of risk factors for detainees in custody. For the purposes of this research NMI have been defined as 'any incidents which resulted in, or could have resulted in, the serious illness, injury or self-harm of a detainee'.

**Aims & Methods:** A prospective study of NMI was undertaken for one year from May 2005 to 2006. Forensic physicians (FP) providing forensic medical services for the Metropolitan Police Service in London were asked to complete questionnaires on any incident that may have been considered an NMI. The questionnaire proforma was developed following a pilot study. Ethical Committee approval was given for this study. The aim of the study was to identify NMIs and to assess whether such incidents assisted in identifying indicators of increased risk within the police custodial setting. Data about all incidents were anonymised.

**Results:** 89 FPs voluntarily participated in this study. One hundred twenty-four proformas were returned in the 12 months study period. Ninety-six were returned identifying the FP and 28 were completed anonymously. 9 FPs returned > 2 proformas. Incidents were classified according to a) type and b) whether they were very likely or fairly likely to result in a fatality. Each incident could have more than one type. Of 124 responses, 36% said that if there had been no intervention, the incident was very or fairly likely to result in a fatality. Of the 124 incidents reported, 60 (48%) were related to suicide/self harm [28% likely to result in fatality]; 41 (33%) were drug related [49% likely to result in fatality]; 29 (23%) were alcohol related [45% likely to result in fatality]; 23 (19%) related to a medical condition / existing injury [65% likely to result in a fatality]; two (2%) were due to injuries sustained during arrest [both likely to result in a fatality]; eight (6%) were reported as being 'other' types of incidents [38% likely to result in a fatality].

**Conclusion:** This is the first prospective study examining risk factors for NMIs in police custody in the UK. The data will help identify particular groups of detainees at increased risk whilst in custody and will allow lessons to be learned in ensuring that care for such vulnerable individuals in custody is optimised.

**Police, Near-Miss Incidents, Death in Custody**