


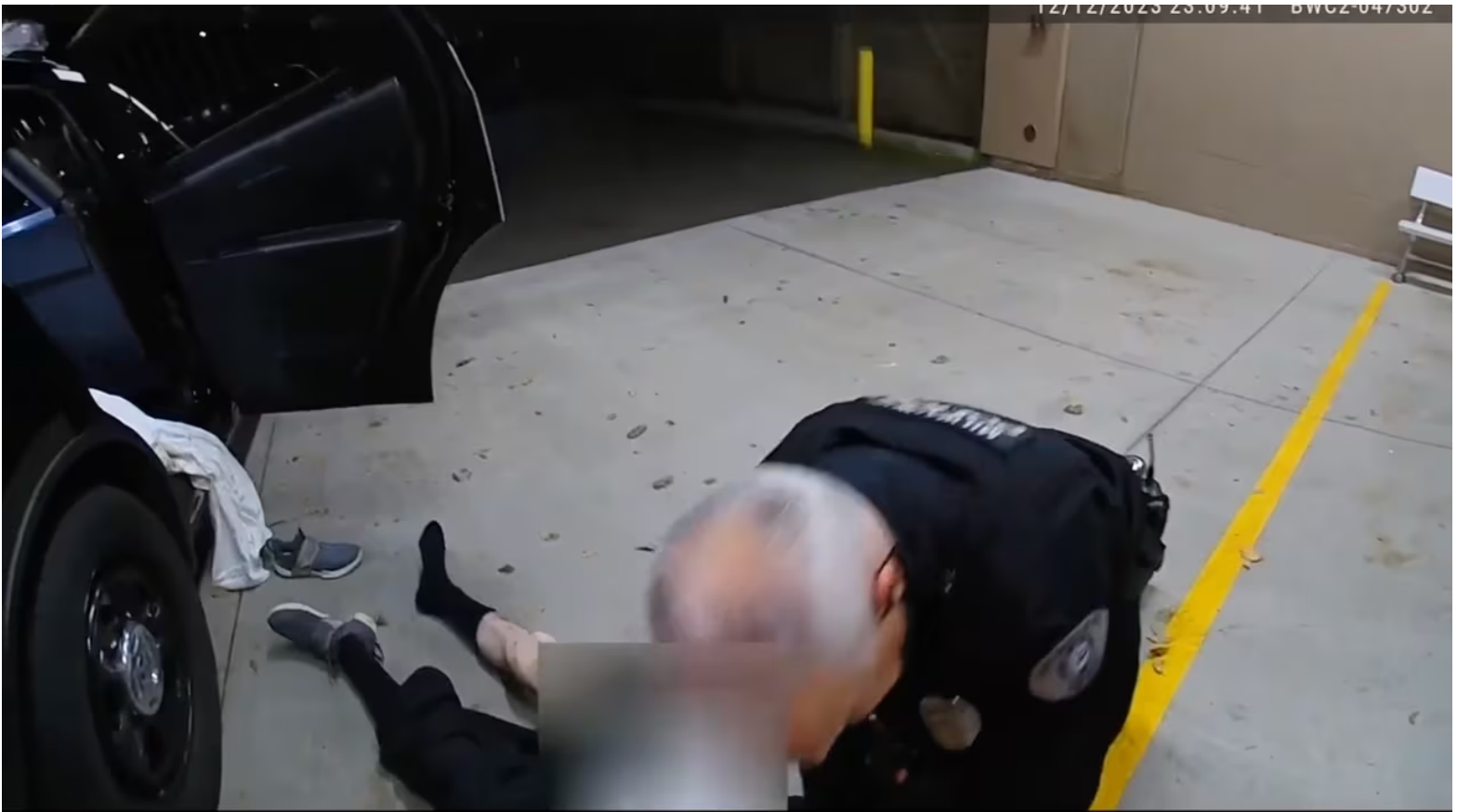
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Providence Milwaukie staff thought man was faking symptoms, didn't do drug screen before he died in police custody, memo says

Updated: Jan. 12, 2024, 8:01 a.m. | Published: Jan. 10, 2024, 4:06 p.m.



Milwaukie police left Providence Milwaukie Hospital with Jean Michael Descamps, 26, at 10:49 p.m. on Dec. 12, 2023, to drive him to Unity Behavioral Medical Center in Portland after ER doctors told police he was "not a medical problem." Descamps was declared dead outside Unity at 11:30 p.m. Milwaukie police body camera footage



By [Maxine Bernstein](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

An emergency department doctor at Providence Milwaukie Hospital thought 26-year-old [Jean Descamps](#) was “playing possum,” essentially faking a medical problem on Dec. 12, and told Milwaukie police they should just drop him off at a bus stop, according to a prosecutor’s review of Descamps’ drug overdose death.

And though hospital staff thought Descamps might be high on opioids, they gave him Narcan but didn’t appear to order a toxicology test or drug screen, the Multnomah County prosecutor wrote.

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Milwaukie police, in contrast, immediately recognized that Descamps couldn’t take care of his basic needs and drove him to Unity Center for Behavioral Health, where he was pronounced dead outside the psychiatric emergency center’s doors after arriving unconscious in the back of the police SUV, prosecutor Deputy District Attorney Devin Franklin found.

A preliminary autopsy determined Descamps died of a drug overdose and other contributing natural causes.

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“There is no evidence of criminal conduct with respect to the officers involved in this incident. Instead, the evidence indicates this was a medical event only,” Franklin wrote in a memo after reviewing Descamps’ death in police custody.

In a similar situation less than three weeks later, a security guard at the Milwaukie hospital dropped a just-discharged 69-year-old woman off at a TriMet bus stop outside the hospital. The hospital gave her a blanket, hand warmers and a bus pass, according to a computer dispatch report.

A TriMet driver said he felt “forced” to accept the woman on his bus though she had soiled her clothes and was unable to care for herself. The driver radioed in a complaint, after the woman fell while attempting to get off the bus and sat on the ground about four stops away from the hospital. A dispatcher for TriMet ended up calling an ambulance that returned the woman to Providence Milwaukie Hospital around midnight.

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Shortly after Descamps’ death, Providence said in a statement that the hospital had failed him.

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“And we extend our apologies and sympathy to his family and friends for their loss. In this case, we fell short of our goal of providing safe, reliable, compassionate care to our patient,” the statement said.

The Oregon Health Authority’s investigation into Descamps’ death continues, according to spokesperson Jonathan Modie. The health authority notified Providence Milwaukie Hospital that it was facing a preliminary “immediate jeopardy” notice, putting its funding from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in peril, according to Modie.

An “immediate jeopardy” notice occurs when a hospital’s failure to follow federal requirements causes a death or serious harm. The hospital presented the state with a corrective plan and implemented it, Modie said. But the state agency is still investigating, he said.

The county prosecutor’s memo provides more details on Descamps’ case:

At 5:35 p.m. on Dec. 12, a TriMet MAX train operator summoned officers because Descamps refused to get off the light rail’s Orange Line. Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office deputies responded and found Descamps covered in feces and moving slowly. Descamps told them he had used drugs and was in pain. He was taken by ambulance to Providence Milwaukie Hospital.

Hospital staff said Descamps showered, was fed and given Narcan. A hospital security guard asked for police at 9:46 p.m. to remove Descamps from the emergency department. The guard said Descamps was “being difficult” and refused to leave though he wasn’t threatening anyone, according to the memo.

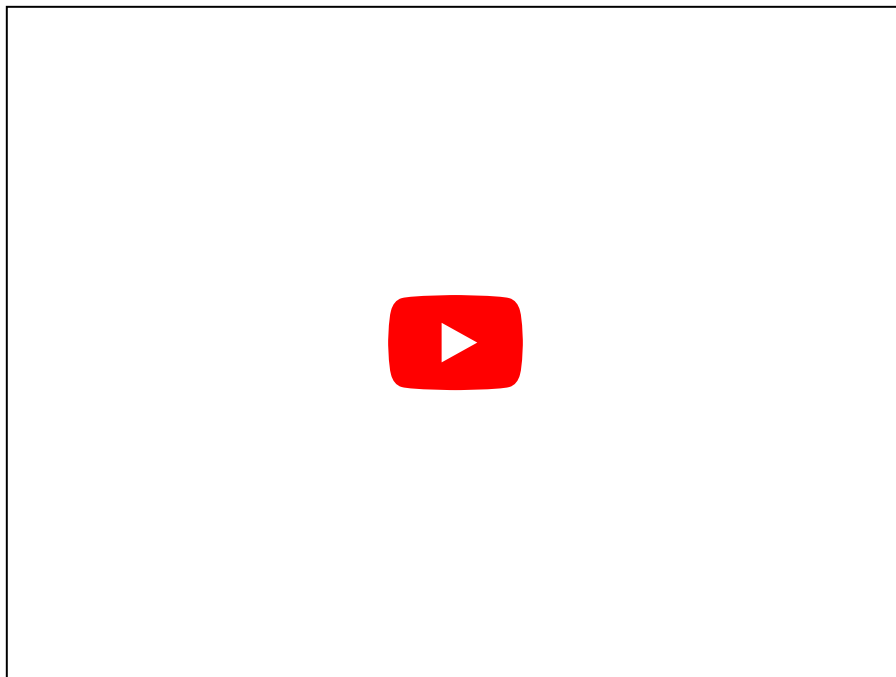
Milwaukie police responded just before 10 p.m. Hospital staff told officers they were familiar with Descamps and said he was a “chronic problem” in the emergency department. They said they prescribed antibiotics to him for an infection and administered the overdose-reversing drug Narcan.

He was described as “perfectly pleasant,” coherent and responsive in hospital records until staff tried to discharge him and he fell out of a wheelchair, according to the memo.

The hospital records show he was given “a little Narcan” to address the possibility he was suffering from “mild opioid intoxication,” but “notably don’t include any indication that toxicology testing was completed or even ordered,” Franklin wrote.

An emergency physician noted in hospital records that Descamps was re-evaluated after Narcan was given to him, and Descamp “continued to be alert,” and was stable for discharge.

Milwaukie police called to the hospital, though, saw him groaning and drooling in a bed and he wasn’t answering their questions, the memo said.



Descamps faced active warrants for his arrest on allegations of criminal mischief and unauthorized use of a vehicle, but the Clackamas County Jail confirmed to police that it would not accept Descamps if couldn’t walk or care for himself.

Though police expressed their concerns to the hospital doctors and nurses that it appeared Descamps needed further care, a doctor insisted that Descamps had “no medical needs,” was feigning his symptoms and needed to be removed, Franklin wrote.

“An ED physician said Descamps was ‘playing possum,’ and the officers should just drop him off at a bus stop,” Frankin’s memo said.

Milwaukie police handcuffed Descamps while he lay in a hospital bed, then moved him to a wheelchair and placed him in the back of a patrol car. They left the hospital at 10:49 p.m. and arrived at Unity in Northeast Portland at 11:01 p.m.

After he pulled up to Unity, the Milwaukie officer driving told Unity that Descamps would need a wheelchair and described him as in “bad shape.” Unity staff directed police to pull into the ambulance bay.

As police waited for someone from Unity to come outside, two Milwaukie police officers removed Descamps from the back seat when they saw that he didn’t appear to be breathing. An officer began CPR on Descamps until Unity staff and ambulance paramedics arrived.

Descamps was declared dead at 11:31 p.m.

“We were shocked when we saw the video, and these additional details compound that shock,” said attorney Amity Girt, representing Decamps’ family.

“It appears that the hospital was more concerned about getting Jean out of their ED than providing proper medical care to assess why he was unresponsive. All it takes is watching the video to see that their decisions were unjustified and reckless.”

In a statement to The Oregonian/OregonLive, Rebecca Stavenjord, a Milwaukie city councilor, said Descamps’ death and the TriMet bus case raise “broader questions about the accessibility and responsiveness of an already strained healthcare system.”

“Our community relies on these institutions to provide timely and effective care, especially in acute and urgent situations. It’s crucial that our healthcare system continues to evolve and improve, especially in how they respond to emergency care needs within unhoused populations,” she said.

In such critical care situations, she said it shouldn’t fall on police to act as “emergency medical providers.”

Stavenjord is one of two city councilors working on the development of Clackamas County’s first crisis stabilization center, to be located in Milwaukie.

“When medical care is required, it is essential that such services are readily available and accessible by all our residents,” she said. “Redirection or refusal of critical emergency services for any population is unacceptable.”

-- Maxine Bernstein

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