



PR#74

PRESS RELEASE

Statement on Incident at Northern Regional Hospital on December 31, 2020

Belmopan. January 6, 2021. 6:10 p.m.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness hereby clarifies an incident involving the mishandling and erroneous release of a corpse at the Northern Regional Hospital on December 31, 2020.

On December 24, 2020, the body of an unidentified elderly man labeled as 'John Doe' was brought to the Northern Regional Hospital by the Police Department. The attending doctor pronounced the person dead and the usual protocol of swabbing for COVID-19 was conducted. Results of the COVID-19 test were negative and the body to date awaits a post mortem. On December 30, 2020, the body of Mr. Fernando Canche was brought to the morgue at the Northern Regional Hospital. The following day, when police arrived at the morgue to retrieve 'John Doe' for burial, due to its unclaimed and unidentified status, the body of Mr. Fernando Canche was instead mistakenly given to the Police Department.

The incident was brought to the attention of the Northern Regional Hospital on January 4, 2021. A meeting was convened that same day by the Regional Health Manager to discuss with all involved, including the son of Mr. Canche, the deceased, to get clarity on the incident and to offer support to the family to get closure from this unfortunate incident.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the management at the Northern Regional Hospital determined that there was a procedural error in the steps for the handling and release of the body from the morgue. Recommendations to ensure this does not reoccur have been forwarded to the Ministry of Health and Wellness, which includes an immediate revision and resensitization of the morgue policies to all staff. Clear communication channels were also reviewed and agreed on with the police personnel present.

The family was offered assistance to exhume and bury the body at the location originally prepared in San Felipe Village. The Ministry has also encouraged the family to submit a request for any financial compensation that this incident may have caused them because of this error on the Ministry's part.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness regrets this unfortunate incident that has regrettably caused unnecessary pain to the Canche family. The Ministry is committed to following up with the family and assures the public that all that is necessary will be done to avoid a repeat of such an incident.

Ends



For more information, contact:
Dr. Melissa Diaz-Musa
Acting Director of Health Services
Ministry of Health and Wellness
822-2325