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Manus death raises serious questions over care: AMA

SONIA KOHLBACHER THE AUSTRALIAN DECEMBER 10, 2014 12:00AM

THE Australian Medical Association has expressed serious concerns about the nature and timeliness of medical treatment given to dying Manus Island asylum-seeker Hamid Kehazaei.

AMA vice-president Stephen Parnis said Kehazaei's treatment, detailed in The Australian yesterday, raises questions about the treatment of asylum-seekers in Australia's detention network.

Kehazaei, 24, died in Brisbane's Mater Private Hospital on September 5 when his Iranian family chose to turn off his life support after treating doctors confirmed he was brain dead on September 2.

Medical records show it took 19 hours for the detainee to be evacuated to Port Moresby after medical staff at the detention centre recommended to the federal government his immediate transfer.

Kehazaei had been admitted to the island detention centre's medical facility on August 23 "for high fever and generalised unwellness" and an abscess on his left leg which developed in severe cellulitis. Kehazaei was transferred to Brisbane on August 27, after having a heart attack in Port Moresby the day before.

Dr Parnis said the AMA had serious questions about Kehazaei's "access to timely and appropriate care".

"All of these individuals are the responsibility of the Australian government and the provision of healthcare is something we cannot compromise on," he said.

"The AMA does have concerns about this specific case. It raises a number of serious questions relating to the care that was provided not only to this gentleman, but may be provided to other (offshore) asylum-seekers."

Dr Parnis called on the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to show greater transparency around health provisions in detention centres.

Doctors for Refugees co-founder Richard Kidd said: "There was a delay in staff appreciating the seriousness of this infection and that's poor.

"It raises the question of whether they've had appropriate training for managing medical emergencies and serious infections on an isolated Papua New Guinean island."

Authorities ought to have anticipated such an emergency and ought to have had a process for swift evacuations that did not involve a hold-up over a patient visa.

“The PNG Guidelines are clear that Hamid should have been having Gentamicin and Chloramphenicol either immediately or certainly within 24 hours of oral antibiotics not making significant improvement,” he said.

“Yet these notes suggest these antibiotics were not available in the detention centre clinic.

“If (government health services contractor) IHMS has not provided supplies of Gentamicin and Chloramphenicol in that environment, I would say that’s serious negligence.”

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison said it was “entirely inappropriate for people to be speculating” on outcomes of a coronial inquest into the death.

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