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Care Worker Who Abandoned Suicidal Teen Used False Identity and Fled UK, Inquest Hears

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A care worker who left a vulnerable teenage girl unsupervised at a Berkshire psychiatric hospital, resulting in her death, had used a false identity and fled the UK shortly after the incident, a coroner has told an inquest.

Ruth Szymankiewicz, 14, died in February 2022 after being left alone for 15 minutes at Huntercombe Hospital near Maidenhead. She had been assessed as requiring constant supervision following a recent suicide attempt. The staff member assigned to monitor her

had been employed under a false name, “Ebo Achempong”, and left his shift without handing over to another carer, in breach of hospital protocol.

The inquest at Buckinghamshire Coroner’s Court heard that Ruth, who had been suffering from an eating disorder and serious mental health difficulties, used the unsupervised time to self-harm in her room. Although she was resuscitated and transferred to John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, she died two days later from brain damage caused by a lack of oxygen, a condition known as hypoxic ischaemic encephalopathy.

Assistant coroner Ian Wade KC told the court that the worker had received only minimal training, reportedly just a day or a day and a half, before beginning his first shift on 12 February 2022. “He simply left,” Mr Wade said, explaining that the worker did not confirm Ruth’s location or ensure another staff member was present to continue her one-to-one care.

It was later discovered that the man had used fraudulent identity documents to gain employment. After Ruth’s death, police traced his mobile phone and found that he had travelled to Heathrow Airport and boarded a flight to Ghana. Authorities believe they know his real name, but he has not been located since leaving the UK.

Mr Wade criticised the hospital’s hiring practices and supervision procedures. The Care Quality Commission (CQC), which regulates health and social care services in England, had inspected the facility twice prior to the incident and issued critical reports. Despite this, no criminal charges have been filed following a joint investigation by the CQC and police.

Huntercombe Hospital, also known as Taplow Manor, closed in 2023 following widespread safety concerns. It was formerly operated by The Huntercombe Group and later managed by Active Care Group.

Ruth had been admitted to Taplow Manor in October 2021 due to a shortage of suitable beds nearer to her home. Her mother, Dr Kate Szymankiewicz, told the court the family had little choice in the placement. Ruth remained on the psychiatric intensive care ward for nearly four months, during which time her mental health deteriorated further. The family was allowed to visit only twice weekly, and Ruth reportedly received little meaningful psychological support.

The court heard that Ruth had previously expressed deep fear about returning to the ward, once saying she would “rather die” than go back. Her mother described the care

she received as restrictive rather than therapeutic, highlighting repeated episodes of self-harm and a lack of appropriate mental health treatment.

The inquest continues.