

## Family want answers on Vic custody death

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**When 24-year-old Thuong Nguyen takes her father's body back to Vietnam on Saturday, she would like to be able to tell her family why he died.**

But so far nobody will tell her.

The machine keeping Dung Hoang Le alive in Melbourne's St Vincent's Hospital was turned off last Saturday, after he had been remanded on drug charges the week before.

Mr Le had been charged with cultivating a commercial quantity of marijuana after police raided 68 Victorian houses in November, allegedly seizing \$30 million in drugs.

But he never made it to trial.

Hospital staff told Ms Nguyen her father may have stopped breathing for 50 minutes before he was found unconscious at the Melbourne Assessment Prison and that he had suffered kidney failure, had blood in his lungs and was brain dead when he arrived at the hospital.

Nuns working at the prison have told her a cellmate found him unconscious in the toilets.

But despite repeated attempts by lawyer George Balot's office on Ms Nguyen's behalf to find out more, Corrections Victoria has refused to give any further information.

On Wednesday, a tearful Ms Nguyen said she felt authorities had neglected her father and treated her unfairly, making her feel something "suspicious" may have happened.

"I really don't know who to blame. I just want to know how he died so he can rest in peace," she said.

"I don't even know how to tell my family he died."

After police on Friday told Ms Nguyen her father had been taken to hospital unconscious, she rang Corrections Victoria seeking details but was told "they couldn't release any information because of confidentiality reasons".

Hospital staff then told her that "even if I turned up to hospital they wouldn't let me in to see him".

Distressed, Ms Nguyen rang Mr Balot, who rang Corrections Victoria, the hospital and every other official source he could think of.

But, he said, no one would tell him anything about Mr Le's condition.

When Ms Nguyen went to the hospital, she was allowed to see her father.

Mr Balot said hospital guards stopped Ms Nguyen taking one last photograph of her father on his deathbed "because they were concerned that it might be leaked to the media".

The machine was turned off after doctors told the family Mr Le was brain dead.

A Corrections Victoria spokesperson told AAP "any death is an emotional time for family and Corrections Victoria respects their right to privacy if there is a death in prison custody".

On Saturday, Ms Nguyen will return her father's body to family in Vietnam.

A married father of five, the youngest just a month old, Mr Le had lived in Australia for 23 years.

Ms Nguyen said he was on a disability pension due to a speech impediment so severe he was considered mute and that he had severe asthma.

The coroner is investigating Mr Le's death and the family expect a preliminary report in about a week.

But, Mr Balot, said Corrections Victoria had done very little to help the family and that its actions should be reviewed.

"In my experience as a solicitor, I have never imagined that there would be such bureaucratic nonsense in failing, from a humanitarian perspective, to reply to a family who just want to know whether their father's alive," he said.