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Concern over university's GP service after suicide

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A senior coroner has expressed concern about how a students' health service prescribed anti-depressants to a deeply stressed 20-year-old who went on to kill herself, the Guardian can reveal.

Natasha Abraham, a Bristol University physics student who had severe social anxiety, was found hanged at her student flat on the day of an oral test she had been dreading.

The senior coroner for Avon, Maria Voisin, has written to the health secretary, Matt Hancock, saying guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) were not followed in her case.

On 20 April last year, Abraham was seen at the university's students' health service by a GP who noted she had run out of medication. She was issued with a prescription for anti-depressants but no arrangements were



▲ *Natasha Abraham was found dead at her flat on the day of a test*

made for a seven-day follow-up as provided for in Nice guidance. Abraham was found dead at 2.30pm on 30 April.

The inquest was told that the usual practice of all GPs at the students' health service was to make follow-up appointments two weeks after prescribing anti-depressants.

At the end of Abraham's inquest last week the coroner focused on failings by the Avon and Wiltshire mental health partnership NHS trust (AWP) in its dealings with her. Voisin concluded that neglect by AWP contributed to her death. In a "preventing future deaths" report, she also flagged up concerns about the lack of a seven-day follow-up.

According to the Nice guidance a person with depression starting on anti-depressants who is considered to be an increased suicide risk or is younger than 30 should normally be seen after one week and as frequently thereafter as appropriate.

The coroner said a review of Abraham's health could have been carried out by a GP or a member of the mental health team. As well as writing to the health secretary, Voisin sent her report to the minister for suicide prevention, Jackie Doyle-Price, the students' health service and AWP.

The coroner wrote: "In my opinion there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken."

Abraham's parents, Margaret and Robert, said in a statement: "If the students' health service had followed the guidance then Natasha would have seen a doctor three days before her death. We will never know what difference this would have made but at the very least it would have given her an opportunity to have a conversation about how she was feeling with someone who was medically qualified."

Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org