

Dying inmate screamed in pain. Utah jailers said it was just drug withdrawal, suit says | Miami Herald

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The parents of Lisa Ostler say jail guards failed to get her medical help while she was suffering from an infection. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA/THE FRESNO BEE
Fresno Bee Staff Photo

Lisa Ostler's screams could be heard by nearby inmates and even ones far away from her at the Salt Lake County, Utah jail, according to the woman's family.

An inmate described Ostler's shouts and moans as a "growl" and a "deathly holler," said a federal lawsuit filed Thursday. Others noticed that she hadn't eaten in two days and appeared dehydrated, the suit said, according to the Deseret News.

Ostler, 37, had been jailed since her late March 2016 arrest. She was taken into custody when police approached her in a parking lot and found some syringes she allegedly used to inject meth and heroin, the Salt Lake Tribune reported.

But Ostler, who suffered from Crohn's Disease — an inflammatory bowel disease that can have life-threatening complications — as well as drug addiction, didn't remain behind bars for long, according to court documents. That's because the woman's health deteriorated over just five days, the newspaper reported, and her parents say the guard and nurses at the jail did nothing to help her.

The pain started two days after Ostler was arrested, the Salt Lake Tribune reported. But despite the constant cries from her jail cell, the staff figured it was the side effects of heroin withdrawal, the suit suggests.

"We're watching her. She's just coming down off of drugs," a jail officer told an inmate, the lawsuit said.

The comment came after a fellow inmate asked a guard to seek medical help, the suit said, according to the Deseret News. The guard allegedly told Ostler, "I'll bet it feels like you're going to die, doesn't it? Just a couple more days."

Ostler's father, Calvin, said his daughter "rocked in pain" for two days, asking for help — "and they just ignored her," he said, reported FOX 13.

It was an inmate who checked on Ostler and found that she wasn't breathing, Ostler's family said. Ostler was taken to a hospital where she was pronounced dead on April 3, 2016, the Deseret News said.

An autopsy revealed she'd developed an infection — peritonitis — related to gastric bypass surgery. It was likely made worse by her Crohn's, the newspaper reported.

Ostler's parents said that two female inmates who'd heard their daughter crying for help contacted them when they were released from jail, the Salt Lake Tribune reported.

"I have PTSD from just listening to [other witnesses recount] the night before she died," Ostler's mother, Kim, told the newspaper.

The family wants compensatory and punitive damages, according to the lawsuit.

A jail spokesman told the Salt Lake Tribune that the sheriff's office doesn't comment on active lawsuits.