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## Drugged driver 'a time-bomb'

**A registered methadone user who took a cocktail of drugs before causing a fatal car crash in 2004 should not have been driving, says Nelson-Marlborough Alcohol and Drug Service manager Eileen Varley.**

Mary Louise Radley, 60, died of extensive internal injuries on the way to Wairau Hospital after the August 26 crash, the Nelson Coroner's Court heard yesterday.

Radley's daughter, Rachael Ford, of Lower Hutt, subsequently co-founded the lobby group Candor, to oppose people driving while drugged.

The Picton man driving the car which crashed into Radley's had taken his daily dose of methadone, and the equivalent of 500mg of the tranquilliser triazolam before driving his partner and their two young children to Blenheim.

The family never made it.

The man, who has name suppression, veered across the road, clipped the rear of an on-coming truck and trailer unit and crashed head-on into Radley's car.

Coroner Ian Smith heard the man had numerous previous driving convictions for careless use, speeding and driving while disqualified.

To questions from a lawyer for the Radley family, Dr Mark Gazley, of Wellington, the inquest heard Varley and Canterbury Methadone Service co-ordinator Dr Anna Boggis say the man had sought treatment for multiple drug addictions from 1992.

He had undertaken, and failed, numerous drug programmes, been involuntarily removed from the methadone programme at least twice, was known to falsify urine tests and was banned from seeking tranquilliser prescriptions from doctors.

Boggis said the man should not have been driving after taking methadone and the tranquilliser.

Varley said the man transferred to the Nelson-Marlborough methadone service in 2003 after the family moved from Christchurch.

She admitted to Gazley that the combination of methadone and the tranquilliser would have enhanced his driving impairment, and that the man's actions had been discussed at a review meeting five months before the crash.

But the service was understaffed, the service's paperwork was inadequate and no health policies to report drugged drivers to the Land Transport Safety Authority were then in place.

The man was also given another chance to stay in the methadone programme in May that year, after he had been admitted to Wairau Hospital for drug psychosis.

Varley admitted the man should have been reported as unfit to drive because of his poor record and multiple drug use.

The service now informs the LTSA if it has concerns about the driving ability of poly-drug methadone users, she said.

Detective Denis Webster, of Blenheim CIB, told the inquest evidence of methadone and the nervous system depressant was found in the man's blood after the crash.

The man had been known to police before the crash, for his numerous accidents and drug associations.

But police could not currently test suspected drugged drivers unless they showed obvious impairment, he said

"He was a time-bomb, but now we are awaiting legislative change," said Webster.

The driver involved in Radley's death was jailed for two years and seven months in 2006.

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