

# Scientologists promised to care for woman who later died

**SUMMARY:** When Scientologists took Lisa McPherson from Morton Plant Hospital, they said they would provide constant care. Seventeen days later, she was dead on arrival.

By **CHERYL WALDRIP**  
of The Tampa Tribune

**CLEARWATER** — On the day Lisa McPherson signed herself out of Morton Plant Hospital's emergency room, fellow Scientologists promised to take good care of her.

"Her friends at Scientology will watch her 24 hours a day and be sure that she gets the care that they want her to have and the patient wants to have," physician

Flynn Lovett wrote in McPherson's medical records on Nov. 18, 1995. "I told them I felt this was OK."

McPherson left with members of the Church of Scientology, who took her to the church's headquarters at the Fort Harrison Hotel in downtown Clearwater.

Seventeen days later, church members took her to HCA (Columbia) Hospital in New Port Richey, where she was dead on arrival. Doctors could not revive her. She was 36.

Her death was caused by a blood clot brought on by "bed rest" and "severe dehydration," according to an autopsy by the Pinellas-Pasco Medical Examiner's Office.

Her arms and legs were bruised. She had abrasions and what appeared to be bug or animal bites.

Clearwater police are investigating her death.

The medical records, provided by McPherson's family, reveal she had a "very minor" car accident on Nov. 18, 1995. At the scene, McPherson took off her clothes, and paramedics took her to Morton Plant for evaluation. The records show she had "no evidence of [an] acute medical problem or injury."

But mentally, she was troubled.

"She stated she needed to talk," Lovett's report said. "She took her clothes off

to make people think she was crazy. She kept switching topics back and forth. ... The Scientologists arrived and told me that they did not want her to see a psychiatrist and that they would be able to handle her themselves."

With her "friends from the congregation" at her bedside, McPherson spoke in a monotone, had a fixed stare through teary eyes and appeared forgetful or confused at times, according to a report by psychiatric nurse Joseph Price.

Asked about her "bizarre behavior," McPherson told Price, "I did it [took

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clothes off] for attention — I did not want to be arrested."

"Patient states, 'I want to go home [with] my friends from the congregation — I won't do anything to harm myself.'"

Lovett's evaluation shows McPherson said she did not want to stay in the hospital, and, although "we feel that she does have a psychiatric problem," doctors could not commit her under the state's Baker Act because she was not a danger to herself or others.

Lovett told her he thought she was capable of making a rational decision about leaving, and she signed herself out against medical advice.

"Again, the Scientology group will observe her very closely and will give her whatever care that they want to do for this problem she

is having," Lovett wrote.

Her family was never notified McPherson had been in a car accident, or that she was mentally unstable, until after her death. Instead of listing her mother as next of kin, Morton Plant records list her supervisor at a Scientologist-owned company.

Asked about the statements in the medical records, Scientology attorney Elliot Abelson said, "That's exactly what we told the Clearwater police and exactly what we told you, and we're really happy it came out."

Abelson said the church "watched her carefully" and that she was not ill until the day she died on Dec. 5, 1995.

Medical records from the New Port Richey hospital where McPherson was taken upon her death show she had a staph infection. Scientology officials have said it was "se-

vere" and have suggested it contributed to her death.

Medical Examiner Joan Wood said Friday it did not.

Wood said she could not comment on the length of time McPherson had been dehydrated prior to her death, except to say "this didn't happen in two or three hours."