Cold Water Survival Fatality File

Dad and Derriford Hospital worker dies from cold water shock after swimming on Plymouth Hoe

A Derriford Hospital radiographer died from cold water immersion syndrome after attempting to swim to a buoy in the Plymouth Sound, an inquest has heard.

Rakesh Vallittayil had met a group of work friends on the Plymouth Hoe on February 21, 2021, before deciding to go for a swim.

An inquest opened by senior coroner Ian Arrow at Plymouth Coroner's Court, heard that Mr Vallittayil was sadly recovered from the sea and pronounced deceased, despite the best efforts of the RNLI and paramedics.

The 41-year-old asked friends to film him swimming for his YouTube channel and was described as a "confident swimmer" by those who knew him.

Mr Vallittayil had recently moved to Plymouth from India just months before his death with a "dream to give better care and life for his family," friends said.

Mr Vallittayil, who was born in Tanur, a coastal town in India, was set to be joined by his family in the UK after he secured a job as a radiographer at Derriford Hospital and moved into a property on North Road East in North Hill.

The inquest heard that on the day of his death, Mr Vallittayil had met with a a group of friends who he worked with at Derriford Hospital.

Mr Vallittayil asked friends to video him as he attempted to swim

to a buoy, approximately 100m away.

As he approached the buoy the visibility for those on shore became poor due to the sun’s glare. However, another family on the waterfront pointed out the swimmer was no longer moving, and the emergency services were alerted.

Mr Vallittayil’s body was pulled from the sea by members of the RNLI team based at Millbay Docks before he was transferred to Derriford Hospital’s emergency department by paramedics.

A postmortem conducted by Dr Malcolm gave a cause of death as being cold water immersion syndrome, a condition caused by cold water leading to reduced arm movement and a “significant reduction in the electrical function of the heart”.