

Autopsy report details Denton's last days

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UC Santa Cruz Chancellor Denice Denton was suffering from depression and had spent six days in psychiatric care just before jumping to her death from her partner's San Francisco apartment building, according to a report released Friday from the San Francisco medical examiner's office.

Denton's mother, Carolyn Mabee, told investigators that her daughter had been released from UC San Francisco's Langley Porter Psychiatric Hospital the day before her death, the report stated. Denton, 46, had been suffering from depression and "was under severe stress related directly to her job and her personal relationship with her partner," the report stated.

'To say that depression was the cause would be an oversimplification.'

M.R.C. GREENWOOD, FORMER UCSC CHANCELLOR

Medical examiners ruled the June 24 death a suicide. The death was caused by multiple blunt trauma injuries as a result of the 33-story fall onto a parking garage, according to the report.

Denton had been prescribed Zoloft, an antidepressant, and Ambien, a sleep aid, according to the report. A second antidepressant, Effexor, also was found in her system.

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Acting UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal addresses the crowd during a memorial Friday marking the one-year anniversary of Chancellor Denice Denton's investiture.

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Denton

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The medical examiner's report laid out Mabee's account of the events leading to Denton's death. It came on the same day that UCSC campus leaders hosted a memorial service for the former chancellor.

In the report, Mabee said her daughter had been acting "completely irrationally," saying she was being chased by police, after leaving Porter Langley. From there, Denton drove Mabee "all over San Francisco."

At 2 a.m., Denton pulled into her partner Gretchen Kalonji's high-rise apartment building to retrieve her purse.

Kalonji had been out of town on business, according to previous reports, and a guest at her 41st floor apartment answered the door. In the elevator, Mabee pushed for the lobby and Denton held onto the up button. Denton told her mother that she did not want to go home. They continued to talk until Denton took off running down the hallway for the stairwell. Mabee ran after her but was unable to keep up and lost track of Denton, who investigators believe climbed up two stories to the rooftop.

In her 16-month tenure at UCSC, Denton drew fire from students and employees, and was caught up in an investigation into unreported pay and perks in the UC system. She was criticized after \$600,000 in renovations were made to her university home — though many of the improvements were not at her request — and for obtaining a high-paying job for Kalonji, a move that prompted protests from UC unions.

Some campus leaders said Friday they had been approached by several of Denton's friends and colleagues who expressed concern about her state of mind and that she showed signs of depression.

But they saw no indication Denton was contemplating taking her life.

"She was an unconventional person and her lack of convention made it hard to read her," said Faye Crosby, a psychology professor and chair of the UCSC Faculty Senate.

"Truly, if people had any idea of the gravity of the issue, we would've intervened," said Lisa Sloan, dean of UCSC's graduate programs. For

Sloan, the days and weeks following the suicide evoked a mixture of sadness, guilt, anger and confusion.

Denton took at least two extended leaves of absence during her tenure. Campus spokeswoman Liz Irwin had said Denton's medical problems were not publicly announced at the time because "we consider medical issues as a private matter."

In one of the instances, Crosby was told that Denton would miss a scheduled meeting due to a physical illness. In the other instance, Denton was said to be "unavoidably detained," although the cause was not made clear.

Denton began a third leave nine days before her death. Her mother had flown out from Texas.

Friday also marked the one-year anniversary of Denton's investiture as chancellor. Crosby organized a 30-minute "moment of remembrance," which was attended by about 20 people seated quietly facing a photo of Denton to the sound of live flute music.

Many have remembered Denton as a woman who tackled a life-threatening illness, overcame sexual and gender discrimination and smashed through the glass ceiling. Denton also was remembered for being a champion of diversity and served as a role model for women and minorities pursuing careers in the sciences.

Denton's predecessor, former Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood, called Denton's death a tragedy Friday and said no one will ever know why the chancellor killed herself.

"To say that depression was the cause would be an oversimplification," said Greenwood, who is a health scientist.

In 2004 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reported that a small number of users of Effexor were prone to suicidal thoughts or behavior. The drug's manufacturer noticed that compared to other popular antidepressants, severely depressed patients who are prescribed with Effexor have a higher pre-existing risk of suicide. The medical examiner's report made no link between the medications and cause of death.

"If we can learn anything, it's about trying to understand depression," said Sloan. "Depression is very elusive. I still turn it over in my mind."

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