

Hollinger Says Noguchi Uses Drugs, Needs Psychiatric Care

Board of Supervisors Asked to Fire County Coroner; Attorney Representing Doctor Denies All Charges

BY RAY ZEMAN
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L. S. Hollinger, county chief administrative officer, Friday accused Coroner Thomas T. Noguchi of taking drugs in excessive quantities and exhibiting symptoms indicating need for psychiatric care.

Hollinger said the coroner should be fired.

Dr. Noguchi is under 30-day suspension as the county's chief medical examiner-coroner.

Hollinger made his charges in a formal report to the Board of Supervisors and in a letter prepared for service on Dr. Noguchi.

He accused the coroner of swearing, threatening his employes, failing to complete autopsy cases promptly and conducting himself erratically and irrationally. He quoted the coroner as saying he prayed for major disasters because of the glory they would bring to the coroner's office.

Godfrey Isaac, the coroner's attorney, immediately denied all the charges.

"Many of them seem to be

distortions and misinterpretation of normal stressful situations which are inherent in dealing with death and disaster," Isaac said.

Dr. Noguchi himself has previously denied erratic behavior or making threats.

In an intense "personality clash" with Hollinger, the Japanese-born pathologist insists he was suspended March 4 because of racial prejudice.

He demands immediate reinstatement in his \$31,104-a-year position.

While his attorney described the 42-year-old pathologist as a zealous worker backed by both his staff members and the entire Japanese community, Hollinger painted a far different picture.

In the accusatory letter, Hollinger said Dr. Noguchi once ordered an aide to shine his (Dr. Noguchi's) shoes.

On another occasion, Hollinger said, Dr. Noguchi threw his shoes at the employe, ordered him out and called him a "black bastard."

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"Several physicians on your staff have expressed the opinion that the symptoms which you exhibit would indicate that you had been taking drugs in both the amphetamine and barbiturate groups," Hollinger continued.

"They all further stated that such symptoms, regardless of their cause, would indicate the need for referral of the patient for psychiatric evaluation and care.

"Many members of your staff, both lay and professional, have expressed grave doubts as to your mental health."

At another point Hollinger wrote, "A number of your employes have stated that over a period of

months they have observed you taking a variety of pills and capsules, some of which appeared to be amphetamine Dexamyl, without indication of physical warranting medication . . ."

'Mafia' Claim

Hollinger charged that on a number of occasions Dr. Noguchi boasted that he was going to take over the office of the Orange County coroner.

"On another, you stated to your administrative deputy that you were involved in a 'forensic Mafia' and that you would be responsible for everything west of the Mississippi while an eastern pathologist with whom you are acquainted would take over everything east of the Mississippi," the letter continued.

At a meeting with a physician in January, the coroner was quoted as expressing a desire to perform autopsies on Hollinger, County Personnel Director Gordon T. Nesvig and Harry Hufford, county budget division chief.

"But you further stated you might have to assassinate Hollinger first," the letter went on.

Hollinger said that last June, after Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot but before he actually died, Dr. Noguchi expressed the belief that the senator had no chance to live and his death would give the coroner a "chance to make a reputation."

Copter Crash

(Dr. Noguchi later supervised the lengthy autopsy on the assassinated senator.)

Last May, after a helicopter crash in which several were killed, Hollinger said Dr. Noguchi "stated that it was too bad these people had to die, but you were glad it happened in your jurisdiction. . ."

"Shortly after a second helicopter crash, you said to your administrative assistant that you wanted a Boeing 707 to crash so that the coroner's office

could increase its budget.

"Over a period of several months following these helicopter crashes, you stated on several occasions that each night you prayed that a 727 loaded to capacity would crash into the International Hotel, because the press would then come and Noguchi would be in the center of attention.

"On one occasion you stated that you prayed that Mayor Yorty's helicopter would crash, because the press would be there and you would be

there and this would bring glory and prestige to the office."

Hollinger charged the coroner unnecessarily expanded activities to build up workloads to justify excessive expenditures.

500 Cases

In January, Hollinger said, there was an excessive backlog of 500 cases awaiting final review and determination of the cause or mode of death.

Last November, the letter said, Dr. Noguchi insisted on performing autopsies on all persons who apparently died of flu so that extensive viral studies would contribute to knowledge in the field of pathology.

"You offered no logical explanation for this innovation . . . even though such a practice would greatly increase the workload of your office and even though you had no laboratory facilities within your office to conduct such viral studies," Hollinger said.

When tissue samples overtaxed the capacity of the coroner's refrigeration chamber, Hollinger charged Dr. Noguchi ordered them destroyed.

In November and December, Hollinger said, Dr. Noguchi began handling deaths resulting from jaundice or liver failure. These previously had not been considered coroner's cases but Hollinger said Dr. Noguchi indicated "great satisfaction" at the

large number in the autopsy room.

In January, the letter said, Dr. Noguchi used a profane epithet in vowing he was "going to fix" Hollinger.

Not Clarified

Another time he pulled a surgical knife from a sheath in his belt, demonstrated its sharpness to a secretary by slicing pieces of paper and then said he intended to use it to perform autopsies on people still living, the letter said. It did not clarify this point further.

Hollinger said in January the coroner showed a plastic cutout to an inquest officer to illustrate a forthcoming autopsy on Hollinger himself.

The cutout bore a large horizontal bar bearing Hollinger's name, the report charged.

Dr. Noguchi on numerous occasions has slammed his office doors with such force, Hollinger said, that the door structure has deteriorated, plaster has fallen and carpenters and painters have been summoned to repair the damage.

In January, the report continued, the coroner entered the office of his administrative assistant (Herbert McRoy), slammed the door, pulled a knife from a sheath, waved it and threatened to cut up another subordinate who was not present.

Threat Alleged

Another time, Hollinger said, Dr. Noguchi again drew his knife after a telephone conversation with one of his physicians and, said in an agitated manner, "I'll kill him. I'll kill him."

The Board of Supervisors, who voted 3 to 2 to hire Dr. Noguchi on Dec. 19, 1967, suspended him March 4 on Hollinger's recommendation pending further investigation.

A prior plan to transfer him, without a pay reduc-

tion, to a post as pathologist in the County Hospitals Department was canceled.

Dr. Noguchi had resigned but then withdrew his resignation before the supervisors could meet to accept it.

Isaac, who intends to appeal any dismissal action by the supervisors next Tuesday, said he will demand a full hearing before the Civil Service Commission if the supervisors fail to grant one.

"Knowing Dr. Noguchi, and aware as I am of his dedication, of his zealous application to his duties and of his nature as a man, I am satisfied that when all of the facts come to light, the charges against him will be proven to be without substantial basis," Isaac insisted.

"It has been said that Dr. Noguchi has been 'meticulous to a fault' in the performance of the specific requirements of his position.

"Anyone who truly knows Dr. Noguchi will immediately recognize the falsity of these charges.

"As President Harry S. Truman once said, 'We cannot drive scientists into our laboratories but by ruthless and reckless attacks we can certainly drive our scientists out.'"