

# Presley Autopsy and Tests Continue

By Victor Colin

Elvis Presley "probably" died of natural causes, not any cause related to drug use, Dr. Jerry T. Francisco, chief medical examiner for the state of Tennessee, said yesterday.

But the public—and pathologists elsewhere—may not get to examine all the evidence from the Presley autopsy and the chemical tests that are still being completed.

None of the tests completed so far on the famed singer's blood and body tissues, show any evidence that any drug, including alcohol, contributed to his sudden death on Aug. 16, the Memphis pathologist told *The Washington Post* yesterday.

If this remains true, explained Francisco — it will be "7 to 10 days" yet before all tests are completed, he reported — the death will be certified as "natural" and under Tennessee law it will be up to Presley's family alone

to decide whether or not to make all the test results public.

If they do not become public, experts throughout the country will have no way of judging just what was done at Presley's autopsy and since to study his death, and whether the tests have been adequate to turn up every possible contributing cause.

The news of Presley's death was accompanied by a spate of charges from former associates that he was or had been "on" various drugs. The Chicago Sun-Times yesterday quoted several forensic pathologists throughout the country as saying Francisco's failure to release all test results could raise serious questions about Presley's demise.

But Francisco said he has no choice under Tennessee statutes but to give the test results only to the family if the cause of death is deemed natural after all examinations are finished. If any unnatural cause of death is

found, or any contribution of any drugs, "the results will be a public record" and everyone will know them, he maintained.

But, "If the death is natural, then the release or non-release of the material will be a private matter for the Presley family to decide," he said. "My speculation is that it probably will be a natural death. I have still seen no evidence that drugs played any part in it."

He said he has had no pressure whatsoever "from anyone" in the Presley family or otherwise, to conceal any cause.

Francisco last week called the death one triggered by a suddenly erratic heartbeat that then made the heart stop. But he said this erratic "cardiac arrhythmia and ventricular fibrillation" were "of unknown causes."

Presley had high blood pressure, an enlarged heart caused by the high blood pressure and some patchy or

partial clogging of his coronary or heart arteries. None of these conditions seemed serious enough to cause a heart attack ordinarily, Francisco said.

But he and heart experts elsewhere also said that such a combination of even mild-seeming conditions sometimes leads to such a death just the same, with no way ever to assign a "cause" with scientific precision.

Francisco is a well-regarded pathologist and professor at the University of Tennessee School of Health Sciences in Memphis. He said yesterday, "I would not conceal any unnatural cause of death."

A well-known pathologist in another city—who asked not to be identified—said, "I know Jerry and he's a good pathologist. If I were in his shoes, I'd use every pressure I could to get the family to put it all on the record, so there could be no future doubts in anyone's mind."