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# FBI Probes 7 Deaths in VA Hospital

By Joel D. Weisman

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CHICAGO, Aug. 19—Admission of all but emergency patients to the Ann Arbor, Mich., Veterans Administration Hospital has been halted after a sudden increase in the number of respiratory arrests which may have caused seven deaths.

The FBI and a team of VA investigators from Washington are probing the increase, which is "more than double the normal amount," according to Dr. Arnold Mouish, administrator of the VA hospital in Ann Arbor.

In most of these cases, according to medical and FBI sources, patients were taking either food or medication intravenously.

Hospital officials confirmed there have been 24 respiratory arrests since July 28 and seven deaths, but declined to list the cause of death pending investigation. The Ypsilanti Press reported an eighth death, involving a patient admitted for treatment of alcoholism. It also said that some of the other deaths involved patients with cancer and severe kidney ailments.

(Mouish said the seven patients who died had "all been extremely ill . . . these deaths were not unexpected," the Associated Press reported.)

[The FBI and VA investigators were looking into the possibility that the respiratory difficulties might have been the result of a drug used to suppress breathing, AP reported.

[Hospital officials said they are checking whether any drugs are missing from the facility's intensive care unit or pharmacy. They stressed, however, that they "do not have confirmation . . . no positive proof" that drugs have been taken, AP said.]

Mouish said the investigation "is not necessarily centering on a human being or human cause." He said the hospital is checking to make sure medication was not tainted by manufacturers and equipment was not defective. "We're looking at everything," he added.

However, sources say federal investigators have already ruled out defects in equipment and tainted fluids.

Mouish summoned the FBI Friday after several staff doctors became alarmed by the rise in respiratory arrests. One doctor, who asked not to be identified, said he believed "something was clearly unnatural when I was involved in treating three arrests in the same immediate area of the hospital within 20 minutes."

Mouish said he did not seek outside help at first because "the overall death rate of 12 to 30 patients a month at the hospital remained about the same during this series of arrest incidences."

Mouish said the hospital "has not been closed by our problem. We're just not admitting new patients, except for emergencies, until we complete the investigation."

The hospital now has 285 patients, down from its average of 311.

Heading the VA team sent to the hospital from Washington is Dr. Laurence V. Foye Jr., deputy chief medical director. A VA spokesman in Washington said, "We are there to investigate why there have been so many respiratory arrests," but would not elaborate.