

Views Differ In Probes of VA Hospital

ANN ARBOR, Mich., Aug. 21 (UPI)—Officials investigating a mysterious outbreak of respiratory failures at a Veterans Administration Hospital said today that any fatal drug doses involved probably were deliberately injected into the victims.

Officials at the hospital said muscle-relaxing drugs—possibly one related to the South American poison curare—may have caused an outbreak of 41 cases of respiratory failure since July 28.

Eight have patients died. VA investigators said they and FBI agents are concentrating on the 15 most suspicious cases, which include two deaths.

"The likelihood is that if it was a drug that was used, it was intentional," said Dr. Duane T. Freier, acting chief of staff at the Ann Arbor facility.

The FBI reported no progress in its investigation. A spokesman said the FBI was not convinced that someone deliberately caused the outbreak.

Dr. Laurence Joye Jr., deputy chief medical director for the VA in Washington and head of the medical investigation, said 15 of the 41 cases were suspicious enough to cause concern.

Earlier, investigators said they virtually ruled out accidental injections, but pending the outcome of complicated laboratory tests, Foye refused to say that the patients received deliberate injections.

The investigation was launched after three patients stopped breathing within 20 minutes of each other last Friday. 15 AUG

The hospital imposed rigid controls on drugs, halted all nonemergency surgery, began limiting admissions and assigned extra personnel as guards in the intensive care section where the injections occurred.

There have been no respiratory failures since the FBI announced it had entered the case at the request of the hospital.

Today the hospital has 237 patients, 80 fewer than usual.