

RELAXANT GIVEN TO V.A. PATIENTS

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Michigan Hospital Aide Says
F.B.I. Is Investigating
'Criminal Intent'
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ANN ARBOR, Mich., Aug. 22—The acting medical chief of staff of the Veterans Hospital here said today that tests had shown that a number of patients at the hospital were given doses of Pavulon, a muscle relaxant that can cause paralysis or death.

Dr. Duane Freier said that agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation "are examining the criminal intent involved."

In the last month, 23 or more patients suffered heart failure or a stoppage of breathing, and eight of them died. The situation came to a climax last Friday when three patients stopped breathing in less than a half hour.

Earlier, Dr. Freier had said that if laboratory tests, which were completed today, should show that Pavulon was the cause of mysterious heart and lung failures that have plagued the hospital for a month, it would mean someone was "unlikely" trying to kill patients.

Additional F.B.I. agents were reported to have been called to the scene today to widen the search for a possible killer.

Both the hospital administration and the F.B.I. declined to comment on today's developments. Arnold E. Muish, the hospital administrator, said that the Veterans Administration had agreed to let the F.B.I. release all information about the situation.

No Arrests Yet

A spokesman for the F.B.I. said that the investigation, which started Monday, had not been completed and that no arrests had been made.

"The number of F.B.I. agents at the hospital had varied throughout the week," the spokesman said when asked whether additional agents had been called in.

A hospital source said that doctors believe that Pavulon was added to intravenous fluids being given to seriously ill patients.

Dr. Laurance Foye, a deputy chief medical director of the Veterans Administration, said on Wednesday that 15 of the 23 cases were "suspect."

These 15 patients—two of whom died—had been recovering satisfactorily from surgery or serious illness when they suddenly went into pulmonary shock. The six who had died previously were buried without samples of tissue being kept for analysis.

However, doctors did take urine and blood samples from the 13 patients who recovered and tissues from the two who died recently, and tried to pinpoint the cause of the sudden seizures.

Dr. Freier said that tests of the urine samples had shown that Pavulon had been administered.

"We have ruled out the possibility that it could have happened at the drug manufacturing level," he said.

No Psychological Check

One F.B.I. source said that agents had been virtually certain since last Monday night that the heart and lung attacks had been deliberately induced.

Before the V.A. clamped an official news blackout on the situation today, Dr. Foye had said that no psychological evaluation of the hospital staff had yet been attempted.

The hospital employs 760 doctors, nurses, technicians and other workers, and has a normal patient load of about 300.

The hospital has declined to identify the patients who may have been murdered. A spokesman said that the hospital wanted to complete the investigation before notifying families.

Dr. Foye and Dr. Freier said this week that most hospitals keep supplies of muscle relaxers on hand for use in surgical procedures. Dr. Foye said that the drugs, if used improperly, can result in loss of breathing, paralysis and death.

Quantities of the relaxants were found last weekend in a ward where several patients had undergone heart and lung collapse. A doctor at the hospital said that there would be no legitimate reason for such drugs to be in a ward.

Dr. Foye said that since last weekend, such drugs have been closely guarded.

The hospital would not say whether there had been any unexpected patient collapses this week. Dr. Foye said that, there would be from three to five such collapses a month.