

Lawmen Collect Evidence in Hunt for

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DETROIT, Nov. 27—The fear and suspicion that was in evidence last August and September at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor has moderated.

But some staff members still ask others to stand by as witnesses when they treat patients in intensive care, and the drug Pavulon is under as strict security at the hospital as narcotics.

Between July 28 and August 15th, Pavulon, a relatively new drug, is believed to have been used repeatedly by someone to kill six patients in the intensive care unit and in attempts to kill several others.

In that time period the hospital had 34 respiratory failures involving 23 patients—about five times the normal rate.

After more than three months of intensive effort, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Attorney's office in Detroit are still struggling to solve the deaths.

Search for Suspects

The attorney's office has opened a grand jury investigation in the last two weeks and the F.B.I. has combed the hospital records in search of suspects. The bureau's laboratories in Washington are using new scientific methods in an

attempt to identify the causes of the deaths.

The agencies are apparently still far from developing evidence that will stand up in court.

The deaths seem to have been caused by the injection of Pavulon with a needle into the coupling devices in the intravenous tubes of seriously ill patients, who then choked to death.

The bureau and the staff at the hospital suspect that a psychotic employee gave the drug to patients in intensive care during the 4 P.M. to midnight shift.

But scientific tests so far have not shown conclusively that Pavulon was the cause of death.

Pavulon, which is known as a curariform drug and is similar in its effect to curare, a poison used on hunting arrows by South American Indians, is usually administered to relax a patient's muscles before surgery or other procedures, such as the insertion of a breathing tube into a throat.

The drug takes effect in about 30 to 45 seconds. It paralyzes the diaphragm, the muscle that enables breathing, but not the heart. It does not affect consciousness or the ability to feel pain, so when the drug was administered to the victims, they could feel that they were choking.

"It feels like instant death," one victim has been quoted

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Slayer of Patients in Michigan Hospital

as saying. "It's like somebody grabbed hold of your throat real quick."

A major problem has been to show the presence of the drug in the bodies of the victims. In one series of tests of urine and blood samples of three patients made by the University of Michigan Pharmacy Laboratory, two of the patients showed a pattern that Pavulon assumes under certain conditions. A third patient, who was used as a control, did not show these patterns.

The tests were inconclusive, however, because eight other substances, including a mouthwash used at the hospital, could have shown the same patterns under the same tests.

Since then, tissue samples

from the bodies of four men who died at the hospital from breathing failure last August have been sent to the F.B.I. crime lab in Washington. The technicians there are still seeking ways to show that Pavulon was in the tissues.

The bureau has also approached the investigation from another direction—it has sought to identify everyone who had access to the intensive care units.

Interrogated Everyone

Up until the first week of October, the bureau had 28 men on the fifth floor of the north wing of the hospital interrogating everyone who worked for the hospital. They also went over the records of

who treated what patient and when. Through interviews they sought to learn the activities of all staff members.

By this procedure, the agents greatly narrowed the number of people who could have been near the victims and ended up focusing on the nurses in the hospital's intensive care unit.

But the evidence developed so far has been largely circumstantial—revealing only that a particular person was treating a particular patient at a particular time.

Two nurses have been subpoenaed by the grand jury, Filipina Narisco of Ypsilanti and Leone Perez of Ann Arbor.