

DR. X IS IDENTIFIED JERSEY PLANNING TO SEEK CHARGES

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Mario Jascalevich Is Named
in Grand Jury Proceedings
on Deaths in 1965-66

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By M. A. FARBER

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HACKENSACK, N. J., March 16—Joseph C. Woodcock Jr., the Bergen County Prosecutor, plans to seek the indictment of Dr. Mario E. Jascalevich, a New Jersey surgeon, on charges of murdering one or more patients with curare at Riverdell Hospital a decade ago, according to law enforcement officials.

Dr. Jascalevich has been referred to as "Dr. X" in The New York Times, which published on Jan. 7 and 8 the results of its investigation into the "suspicious" deaths of nine or more patients in 1965 and 1966 at the small osteopathic hospital in Oradell where at which Dr. Jascalevich was formerly chief surgeon.

However, his name has now emerged in the grand-jury proceedings that began yesterday and in legal documents that are publicly available. In addition, his identity appears to be well known in medical circles in the state.

Dr. Jascalevich, a 48-year-old Argentine immigrant who practices in West New York, has declined to be interviewed regarding the case.

Publication Criticized

His lawyer, James E. Anderson, reiterated at an unusual news conference today that his client was innocent of any wrongdoing and had "nothing to hide."

The lawyer, who had declined to have his own name put in this case, said today, would neither confirm his client's denial nor answer specific questions, making Dr. Jascalevich's use of curare a decade ago.

But he said that "a Roman circus spectacle" had been created by the publication of results of chemical tests on five bodies recently examined in Mr. Woodcock's new investigation of the case.

In another development,

In another development today, a chemist who is performing some of those tests for Dr. Richard Coumbis, the chief toxicologist of New Jersey, said that he had found curare in the tissues of each of the four bodies he had examined so far.

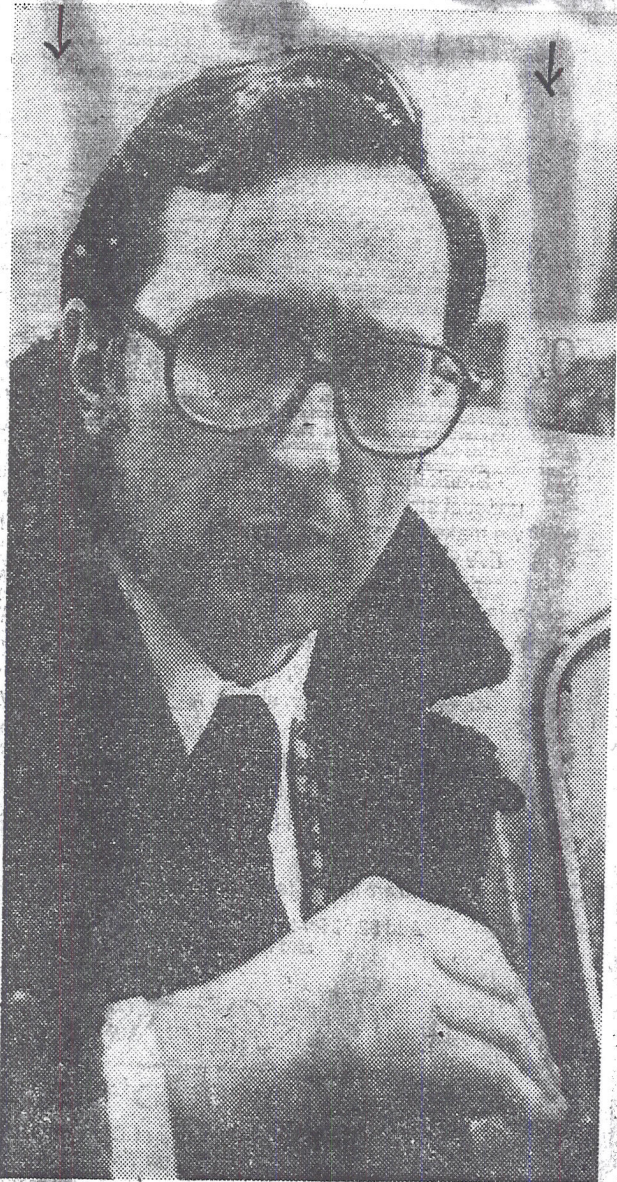
In an interview with The New York Times, the chemist, Dr. David P. Beggs of the Hewlett-Packard Company in Avondale, Pa., said he had detected curare in at least one organ of each of the bodies and, in some instances, in more than

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is believed to have examined tissues from the fifth body exhumed, that of Carl Rohrbeck. But tissues from the four other bodies have been examined by medical scientists, including Dr. Beggs, in four states—New York, New Jersey, California and Pennsylvania.

Inquiry Reopened

Two months ago, in reopen-



Dr. Mario E. Jascalevich outside his office last week

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one organ. "The curare is there," Dr. Beggs said.

The Times reported yesterday that other medical scientists involved in the case said they had established and confirmed the presence of the potentially lethal respiratory depressant in the two bodies on which they had worked.

None of the medical scientists

ing the investigation, Mr. Woodcock had ordered the exhumations.

The 13 "unusual or unexplained" deaths had been investigated in late 1966 by Guy W. Calissi, then the Bergen County Prosecutor. But Mr. Calissi, who is now a Superior Court judge, dropped his investigation after two weeks, without presenting the matter to a grand jury.

Mr. Woodcock's renewal of the investigation—there is no statute of limitations on murder in New Jersey—followed an extensive inquiry into the deaths by The Times.

The Prosecutor was also informed last January by Dr. Michael M. Baden, a leading forensic pathologist, that nine or more of the sudden, unexpected deaths were "not explainable by natural disease

processes or the stated causes of death" and were consistent with death by a fast-acting drug such as curare, which can paralyze the breathing muscles.

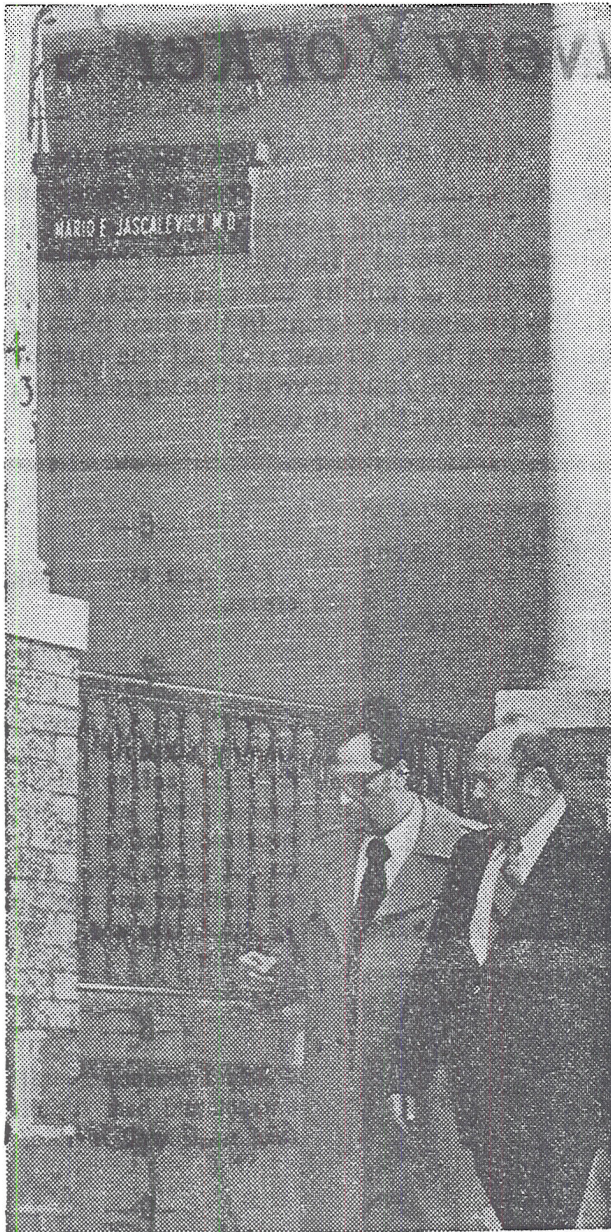
Dr. Jascalevich did not operate on any of the 13 patients, nor was curare prescribed for the persons whose postoperative deaths at the hospital came to be viewed as suspicious.

The original investigation, in November 1966, was prompted by the discovery of 18 vials of curare, most of them empty or nearly so, in Dr. Jascalevich's locker at Riverdell. The locker had been deliberately opened by Dr. Stanley I. Harris, then a 34-year old surgeon, who suspected Dr. Jascalevich of "performing these deaths."

Dr. Harris the Surgeon

Many of the 13 persons who died—often following respiratory arrests—had been operated on by Dr. Harris.

Dr. Jascalevich was the only person against whom Mr. Calissi's investigation was officially "directed." The surgeon denied any wrongdoing during that



Dr. Mario E. Jascalevich, left, with his attorney James E. Anderson, outside his office in West New York, N.J.

inquiry and said he was using curare in research at right on "dying dogs" in the animal quarters at Seton Hall Medical School in Jersey City. The Medical School later was moved to Newark and is now the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry.

As far as is known, Dr. Jascalevich's account of his alleged research at Seton Hall in 1965 and 1966 has never been corroborated. And employees of the animal quarters have sworn that no one could have carried out experiments there in the manner described by Dr. Jascalevich.

From 1962 to 1966 Dr. Jascalevich was an unsalaried part-time lecturer in the anatomy department at Seton Hall Medical School.

He is now a clinical assistant professor of surgery at the New Jersey College of medicine and

Dentistry — again unsalaried and part-time.

The surgeon performs operations at Christ Hospital in Jersey City and, apparently on rare occasions, at the Jersey City Medical Center in Jersey City and at North Hudson Hospital in Weehawken. His office, formerly his residence as well, is at 435 60th Street, West New York.

Client 'Distressed'

Mr. Anderson said today that his news conference, at the Sheraton Motor Lodge in Hasbrouk Heights had been his idea that his client had been aware of it.

He said that news accounts of Mr. Woodcock's investigation had greatly "distressed" his client and that, if the doctor's name were published, his client might "be obliged to go into seclusion."

The lawyer cautioned against any "premature" interpretation of the test results on the exhumed bodies, saying that experts sometimes err. If curare caused any of the 13 deaths, he said, "anyone could have done it" because "the doctor was not the only one with access to curare" in the hospital stock.

Between September 21, 1965, and September 28, 1966, Dr. X bought 24 10-cubic-centimeter vials of curare from a surgical supply company across the street from his office. AS little as five to six cubic centimeters of the standard solution of curare can, unless artificial respiration is administered, cause death.

The bodies in which curare has definitely been found by medical scientists are those of Nancy Sevino, who was 4 years old at the time of her death on March 21, 1966, and Emma Arzt, who was 70 when she died on Sept. 23, 1966.

2 Other Bodies

The two other bodies in which curare has apparently been found by Dr. Beggs are those of Frank Biggs and Margaret Henderson.

Mr. Biggs was a 59-year-old accountant who underwent surgery in late August 1966, for a duodenal ulcer with obstruction. His recovery seemed uneventful until the night of Aug. 28, 1966. At 8 P.M. a nurse noted on the hospital chart that evening care was given and that the patient had no pains and "very good color."

At 9:10 P.M. Mr. Biggs was found cyanotic (blue) and was having difficulty breathing. Dr. Jorge Ortega, an interne, and Dr. Jascalevich responded to a call for help from the nurse. A respiratory stimulant was given, and Mr. Biggs's heart was massaged externally, but he was pronounced dead at 9:30 P.M.

An autopsy revealed no anatomic cause of death. Although Mr. Biggs's heart was found to be entirely normal, his death was ascribed to an excessively rapid heart beat caused by a large amount of urine in the bladder.

Mrs. Henderson, a 26-year-old woman, was admitted to Riverdell at 5:05 A.M. on April 22 complaining of severe abdominal pain. She was operated on by Dr. Harris and Dr. Robert Livingston at 6 A.M.—against the advice of Dr. Jascalevich, who called for consultation and who wanted additional x-rays taken. The surgeons "found nothing."

Day Uneventful

Mrs. Henderson's postoperative course throughout that day was apparently uneventful, but after a "fairly comfortable night" she was found to be "tense and apprehensive" at

6:30 A.M. on April 23. At 7:30 A.M. she was given a bath.

Half an hour later, according to the hospital chart, Mrs. Henderson complained of an inability to swallow and of pain in her legs and chest, and Dr. Jascalevich started an intravenous feeding of glucose and water. Whether this was set up before or after the patient's complaints is unclear.

Some time during the next 45 minutes Mrs. Henderson was visited by another doctor, and Dr. Livingston, her own physician, was called. At 8:45 A.M. the chart noted, she was pronounced dead.

An autopsy attributed Mrs. Henderson's death to acute hepatic necrosis—hepatitis. Dr. Jascalevich is his later testimony concurred with that finding when asked about her death. But Dr. Edwin Frieman and Dr. Harris both argued in their testimony that the autopsy conclusion was wrong.

With a necrotic liver, Mrs. Henderson would have been jaundiced, Dr. Frieman testified. "Why the sudden demise within a half-hour?" he said. "She didn't develop the necrotic liver overnight, and I felt this was not a liver death."

Dr. D. E. Brown, the pathologist who did the microscopic examination for the autopsy, stated in his separate report that he had found nothing in Mrs. Henderson's liver or other organs "which is clearly indicative of the cause of death."