

Hackensack, N.J.

A surgeon was charged yesterday with five counts of murder in the "Dr. X" case involving mysterious deaths in a hospital a decade ago. Prosecutors couldn't prove murder then, but they say medical advances make it possible now.

Traces of curare, a muscle-relaxing drug that can kill when given in large doses, reportedly were found in laboratory tests of tissues from the five bodies after they were exhumed this year. Authorities would not say whether the surgeon, Dr. Mario Jasclevich, is charged with giving the victims this drug.

Jasclevich, of Englewood Cliffs, was arrested yesterday, en route to work at Christ Hospital in Jersey City. He pleaded not guilty at an arraignment and was held for several hours before being released on \$150,000 bond. He was not available for comment.

During much of the investigation, news accounts had referred to the doctor under investigation only as Dr. X.

The story began in 1966 when 13 unexplained deaths at Riverdell Hospital in Oradell prompted an investigation.

The investigation was eventually dropped when it was impossible to prove foul play.

Eighteen vials of curare were found in Jasclevich's locker at Riverdell Hospital in that investigation, but he said he was using it for experimental purposes with dogs.

Bergen county Prosecutor Joseph Woodcock said one of the reasons the case was reopened is that "the medical arts have advanced in the last ten years in determining the cause of death."

Although five bodies were exhumed, the bodies of the other eight persons involved in the case will not be exhumed, Woodcock said.

"We went after those where we felt we could establish a cause of death other than that appearing on the death certificates," Woodcock said.