

Doctor Says She Now Doubts Coppolino's Account

By HOMER BIGART

Special to The New York Times

NAPLES, Fla., April 10—Dr. Carl A. Coppolino, on trial on a charge of having murdered his first wife, heard a woman doctor testify today that she no longer believed his statement that he awoke to find her lying in her bed dead of a heart attack.

The state of Florida contends that Dr. Coppolino murdered his wife, Carmela Anne, on Aug. 28, 1965, in their home on Longboat Key, off Sarasota, by giving her an injection of a lethal drug.

Over the angry objections of defense counsel F. Lee Bailey, Dr. Juliette Karow—a general practitioner of Sarasota, who had signed the death certificate—said it appeared to her that Mrs. Coppolino's body had been moved after her death.

Body Described

Dr. Karow, the first witness for the state, said she was suspicious because the bed on which Mrs. Coppolino was lying looked unmussed, the covering sheet seemed freshly unfolded and the pillow did not seem slept on. Also, there was something peculiar about the posture of Mrs. Coppolino, Dr. Karow testified.

She said she found Mrs. Coppolino lying on her right side,

her right arm beneath the body and both fists clenched and raised to chest level. But the witness said that the fists were of equal size and that this was curious, because the right fist, if it had borne the weight of the body for more than a few minutes before death, should have been red and swollen.

The head, she said, was propped on a pillow. The right portion of the face was discolored, and it should not have been discolored if it had been in that propped position since death, Dr. Karow said.

Apart from Dr. Coppolino, Dr. Karow was the first person to see Mrs. Coppolino after her death.

"Carl called me at 6 A.M.," she told the court, and he said, 'Julie, will you please come quickly.'

"I immediately got up and drove to the house. Carl met me at the door. He said, 'She's dead.' He led me into the bedroom."

Autopsy Experience

Prosecutor Frank Schaub had asked Dr. Karow if she had noticed anything unusual about the body and Mr. Bailey objected bitterly. He wanted to know how much experience Dr. Karow had with corpses.

She replied that as a medical student at the University of Michigan she had attended

several autopsies and that she had since observed bodies during her 15-year practice in Florida. Circuit Judge Lynn Silvertooth allowed her to continue.

Dr. Karow said that despite her observance of what she called peculiarities in Mrs. Coppolino's body, she signed a death certificate to the effect that she had died of coronary occlusion.

Certificate Amended

Mr. Schaub asked: "On what basis?" Dr. Karow replied: "What Carl Coppolino told me, that she suffered chest pains the day before. This is as much as he told me, that she had suffered chest pains all day."

Q. Did you elicit this history from anyone else?

A. No, but he told me that she was also nauseated and had taken some antiacid pills. I assumed he knew a lot about heart disease because he himself had a heart condition.

Later, Mr. Schaub asked her if anyone ever told her that Mrs. Coppolino had heart disease. The witness replied, "No."

Mr. Bailey objected, saying that Dr. Karow had never been Mrs. Coppolino's physician.

The defense had protested the introduction by the prosecution of an amended death certificate, on which Dr. Karow changed

the cause of death from coronary occlusion to "unknown."

Mr. Bailey pointed out that the change was made Nov. 10, 1966, long after the indictment and the preliminary hearing, in which Dr. Milton Helpert, chief medical examiner of New York, testified that Mrs. Coppolino had been killed with a lethal dose of succinylcholine, a muscle-relaxing drug.

Dr. Karow, who had befriended the Coppolinos when they moved to Sarasota from New Jersey in April, 1965, will be cross-examined by Mr. Bailey when the trial resumes tomorrow.

Earlier today, after the jury had been sworn in, the prosecution suffered a blow. Judge Silvertooth ruled that evidence relating to Dr. Coppolino's first murder trial in New Jersey last December could not be heard here. On Dec. 15, in Freehold, N.J., Dr. Coppolino was acquitted of the charge that he murdered his neighbor, Lieut. Col. William E. Farber, in Middletown Township, N.J.

George Georgiuff of the prosecution argued that evidence showing a "similar plan" in the deaths of Colonel Farber and Mrs. Coppolino should be admissible. The state could prove, he said, that Dr. Coppolino committed similar acts in both cases.