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Medical Foundation Expected to Receive \$1.5 Billion Hughes Estate if a Will Exists

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SAN FRANCISCO, April 6—If Howard R. Hughes signed a will before he died, the best guess is that his \$1.5 billion estate will go to the medical foundation he established in 1954.

It was not known outside a very small circle today whether Mr. Hughes left a will. He died yesterday afternoon aboard an ambulance plane flying from Acapuloc, Mexico, to Houston.

Persons who dealt with Mr. Hughes for decades insist that it is entirely possible he died without a will.

Many stories have been passed down from those few who had close contact with Mr. Hughes that picture him using his wealth—and his plans for disposition of it after death—as weapons in arguments to win his way.

His interest in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute has been known for many years.

Telephone News Conference

The last time Mr. Hughes's voice was heard publicly was on Jan. 7, 1972, when he spoke during a telephone news conference to a group of reporters gathered in Los Angeles. Mr. Hughes was then in the Bahamas.

He was asked that day, among other things, about his views about medical research and replied: "I'm most interested. Eventually, that's where the bulk of my estate will go."

Within the circle of executives maneuvering for Mr. Hughes's favor a position as a director of the institute was always taken as the ultimate accolade.

Those serving when Mr. Hughes died are Chester C. Davis of New York, chief counsel of the Summa Corporation, the Hughes holding company; F. W. Gay of Encino, Calif., executive vice president of Summa, and Madine Henley of Los Angeles, senior vice president of Summa. Mr. Hughes' long-time confidante who began as his secretary.

None of those three were available for comment. One highly placed insider in the Hughes empire said he guessed that if anyone knew about a will, it would be Miss Henley, because "she would have been the one who typed it."

To the suggestion that Mr. Davis might have been the one who would have drawn the will, since he is chief counsel

of Mr. Hughes's holding company, the response was that Mr. Hughes was much closer to Miss Henley.

The affairs of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute were examined in hearings before the House Banking and Currency Committee in early April 1973. The hearings were held to look into alleged tax avoidance by such tax-free foundations.

Seymour S. Mintz, the tax adviser to the institute—and presumably to Mr. Hughes, al-

though this was not specified—was a witness. Michael Flaherty, assistant counsel of the committee, says he was told at the time that Mr. Hughes planned to leave the bulk of his estate to the institute.

Mr. Hughes enjoyed the independence of total ownership. This led him to the establishment of himself as sole trustee of the medical institute, as he was sole stockholder of the Summa Corporation, in which most of his wealth is held.