

## Doctors Differ on Cause, Treatment

# Conflict over Hughes' Death

### New York

Contradictory accounts about the final days and illness of Howard R. Hughes have emerged from interviews and public statements about the reclusive billionaire's recent death.

Some evidence, including statements by doctors who treated the 70-year-old Hughes and by present and former associates, suggests that he resisted or refused treatment that could have prolonged his life.

The possible significance of these contradictions is not clear. But the question of whether Hughes was competent to manage his affairs during the last stages of his life, or was under the control of others, could become important if a court battle develops over the disposition of Hughes' \$1.5 billion estate.

The following are the inconsistencies in the accounts of the last days of Hughes:

- Dr. Victor Emmanuel Montemayor, a Mexican physician summoned to examine Hughes in Acapulco, said that Hughes' doctors told him that Hughes had a "convulsion" on Friday, April 2, and that he had been in a coma since that time. "I have the impression that it was a brain hemorrhage that started off the entire problem," Dr. Montemayor said in an interview.

"The coma was very deep and there was no explanation because the kidney analysis was practically normal. On Friday he had a violent and sudden shock, which I imagine was the stroke, probably through a brain hemorrhage. Immediately he entered into a coma."

Dr. Lawrence Chaffin, a Hughes doctor who was in attendance when Hughes died, said that when he saw Hughes on April 4 the patient was not in a coma; in fact, he said, Hughes was partially conscious and he found no evidence of a stroke.

- Dr. Chaffin said the blood-urea-nitrogen test he ordered late on April 4 showed that Hughes was suffering from a kidney ailment and this was later noted as the cause of death.

But Dr. Montemayor, reading the same test results, said, "The blood test was good, the urine test was good, all the analyses taken

after he entered into coma, were relatively normal."

Dr. Chaffin said he had treated Hughes' "surgically related" medical problems on a consultant basis and that the billionaire recluse's day-to-day care was handled by three physicians.

But, Dr. Chaffin said, on the night of April 4 Hughes' medical condition was "deteriorating rapidly" so he stepped in and ordered blood and urine tests without Hughes' permission.

He said Hughes was only partially conscious during this period.

Dr. Chaffin says he was with Hughes continuously from Dec. 23, 1975 until his death on April 5.

For nearly two weeks before his death, Hughes was treated by Dr. Norman Crane of Los Angeles, one of three physicians who shared responsibility for his care. Dr. Crane did not accompany Hughes when he flew to Houston on April 5.

Dr. Chaffin said that he did not establish that Hughes was suffering from a chronic kidney ailment until a little over 13 hours before the time of death. Subsequently an autopsy in Houston established that Hughes had died of kidney failure.

Dr. Chaffin said that since Hughes broke his hip in London in 1972, he had been virtually bedridden and increasingly dependent upon the group of aides and medical men around him.

Most of the men closest to Hughes in his last days had been selected for the job, directly or indirectly, by Frank William Gay, the executive vice president and director of the Summa Corp., Hughes' holding company.

Gay is a Mormon; indeed, a significant number of men in the senior echelon at Summa and around Hughes were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

There were, in effect, two circles of companions to Hughes.

The inner circle, according to Summa sources, consisted of Lavar Myler and Howard Eckersley, both of Salt Lake City, George Francom, of Las Vegas, Clarence A. Waldron and John Holmes of Los Angeles.

The "outer circle" included Eric E. Bundy and Clyde B. Crow of

Los Angeles and Roy Crawford of Burbank. Despite repeated visits to their homes, telephone calls and requests through the Summa Corp., none of them would agree to an on-the-record interview.

In effect, the responsibility for Hughes' medical care seemed relegated to his "outer circle." Dr. Chaffin said that he could get permission to examine Hughes by going through an aide. He said he did not believe that the other doctors had much better access.

In early February of this year, the Hughes party moved to Acapulco, according to sources there, and sealed off the top floor of the luxurious Princess Hotel. Hughes stayed in a darkened room — its windows sealed by plywood and black curtains — where he slowly succumbed to kidney disease.

Dr. Chaffin said he and the other doctors were concerned about Hughes' weight loss in Acapulco. But at no time before April 4,

Dr. Chaffin said, does he recall being convinced that Hughes had a kidney ailment or discussing it with the other doctors.

Dr. Chaffin said he did not know when, before April 4, Hughes might have had the test for kidney ailment.

He described Hughes as a "willful" and difficult patient who would not submit to medical procedures easily and who had had dramatic weight losses earlier because he would not follow a proper diet.

During his Las Vegas sojourn Hughes had suffered from anemia and malnutrition brought on by eating only candy bars, other sweets and drinking milk, Dr. Chaffin said.

Now, in retrospect, Dr. Chaffin says, "You could ask, why in God's name wasn't something done for him? But with Howard Hughes you just couldn't do things." Failure to permit proper tests, he said, "was entirely his own fault because he would not allow it. He made his own decision about everything."

Dr. Chaffin said on April 4 an aide to Hughes summoned him to the darkened room because he was "concerned" about Hughes' condition. Dr. Chaffin said he had found

Hughes breathing fast, only semi-conscious and "deteriorating rapidly."

Dr. Chaffin said he took the initiative to order blood and urine tests. He said that Dr. Crane drew the blood for the tests. At midnight, the results came in, Dr. Chaffin said, and confirmed his suspicion that Hughes had a kidney ailment.

Dr. Chaffin said he had realized that if they hospitalized Hughes in Mexico they would need a local physician because neither he nor Dr. Crane was licensed to practice outside the United States. Dr. Chaffin said he had called in Dr. Montemayor, whose name he had received from a patient.

The Mexican doctor said he arrived at 6 a.m. on April 5, and found a nude, emaciated man with bedsores, who was covered by a pastel sheet. His hair was long but not "hippie length" and his beard was trimmed to about an inch and a half, according to the doctor.

Of accounts about long, curling finger nails, Dr. Montemayor said, "I saw his hands and his nails didn't attract my attention. He was well looked after and clean." Bedsores are to be expected in such cases.

Local hospitalization was ruled out by the three doctors because the hospitals lacked sufficiently sophisticated equipment and personnel to handle such a case. Houston was chosen as the nearest city with adequate facilities.

The plane bearing Hughes left shortly after 11 a.m. for Houston. Dr. Chaffin said Hughes was alive when the plane took off. According to the information later given to Houston medical officials, Hughes died at 1:27 p.m., about 23 minutes before the aircraft's scheduled arrival.

Dr. Chaffin said he did not record the time, but recalled looking out of the window at the time and noting that the plane had just passed from over the Gulf of Mexico across the shoreline to Brownsville, Tex.

This is a crucial point, he said, because of the "enormous red tape" and "difficulties" that would have arisen if Hughes had died in Mexico.