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COPPOLINO GIVEN DRUG, SAYS FRIEND

Murder Jury Told That He Was Shipped 6 Bottles

By HOMER BIGART

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NAPLES, Fla., April 18 — Dr. Carl A. Coppolino acquired six bottles of a paralyzing drug a month before the sudden death of his wife, Carmela, saying he wanted it for experiments on animals, a witness at the Coppolino murder trial testified today.

It was further brought out by the prosecution that just before her death, Mrs. Coppolino had increased one of her insurance policies by \$10,000, raising the amount to \$40,000.

Finally, to bolster its contention that Dr. Coppolino was driven by greed to commit desperate acts, culminating in the murder of Mrs. Coppolino on Aug. 28, 1965, by a lethal injection of succinylcholine, the state called as a witness a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The former agent, John L. Keaveney of Shrewsbury, N. J., testified that Dr. Coppolino had admitted writing anonymous notes threatening the life of a rival anesthesiologist at River-view Hospital, Red Bank, N. J., in 1962.

As the result of this exposure, Dr. Coppolino was dismissed from the hospital staff, the prosecutor, Frank Schaub, told the court.

Judge Lynn Silvertooth, who had sent the jury from the courtroom because of defense efforts to exclude the testimony, ruled that Mr. Keaveney's testimony was not admissible at this time, but that it might be admitted later if the prosecution could prove that Dr. Coppolino was dismissed as the result of the episode. Mr. Schaub then promised to produce a hospital official who would substantiate the story.

'Faked' Heart Ailment

After the dismissal, Dr. Coppolino "faked" a heart condition so that he could obtain \$22,000 a year in disability payments,

Mr. Schaub said.

When the Coppolinos moved to Florida, he continued, Mrs. Coppolino, who had earned \$16,000 a year as a medical researcher in New Jersey, failed to pass the Florida medical examination and was not allowed to practice here.

No longer a financial asset alive, she was murdered for her insurance and to clear the way for Dr. Coppolino's marriage to Mary Gibson, a wealthy divorcee, the prosecutor charged. The marriage took place six weeks after the death of Mrs. Coppolino.

In early June, 1965, Dr. Coppolino wrote to a friend in the Squibb Laboratories, New Brunswick, N. J., asking for succinylcholine, a drug commonly used by anesthesiologists to relax the muscles of patients during operations, according to the friend's testimony.

The friend, Dr. Edmund Leslie Webb, associate director of medical research at the laboratories, testified today that he had shipped six bottles containing a total of 2,800 milligrams of succinylcholine to Dr. Coppolino on July 21, 1965. Medical experts have testified that 1,000 milligrams would have been a fatal dose for Mrs. Coppolino.

Amount Unspecified

Under cross-examination by the defense counsel, F. Lee Bailey, Dr. Webb said that Dr. Coppolino had not asked for any specific amount of the drug. But since Dr. Coppolino had told him that it was to be used in animal experiments, Dr. Webb sent 2,800 milligrams, which he considered enough for experiments on "six or eight animals."

At that time, 1965, the drug was considered undetectable after injection. Dr. Webb said

that he had gathered from Dr. Coppolino's letter that the planned experiments were for the purpose of disproving that theory.

Dr. Webb wrote to Dr. Coppolino suggesting that cats be used in the experiments. Former neighbors of the Coppolinos on Longboat Key, off Sarasota, have testified that the Coppolinos had no cats.

The Easiest Way

When an autopsy on Mrs. Coppolino Dec. 17, 1965, showed a needle puncture wound in her left buttock, a toxicological examination extending over several months was ordered by Dr. Milton Halpern, the chief medical examiner of New York City. Finally his toxicologist, Dr. Charles Joseph Umberger, using a new analytical method, discovered succinic acid and choline, the components of succinylcholine in the liver and brain of Mrs. Coppolino.

This morning Judge Silvertooth denied a defense motion to strike out the testimony of Dr. Halpern and Dr. Umberger and to terminate the trial.

Another medical witness, Dr. Valentino Mazzia, the chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at New York University Medical College, then testified that the easiest way to murder anyone with succinylcholine would be by an intramuscular injection, such as the prosecution contends was given Mrs. Coppolino.

In Mr. Keaveney's testimony before the judge, reporters and spectators, he said Dr. Coppolino had voluntarily admitted on November, 1962, to sending two unsigned letters and four unsigned postcards to Miss Lucy Trachine, a fellow anesthesiologist.

The reason given by Dr. Coppolino, Mr. Keaveney said, was that he resented Miss Trachine's "taking income that was rightfully his."