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Two nurses face charges of criminal negligence

Death of girl the result of drug interaction that led to cardiac and respiratory arrest

BY GRAEME SMITH

Two nurses at a Toronto children's hospital will be charged this week in the death of a 10-year-old girl, their lawyer says.

Ruth Doerkson and Anagaile Soriano were told on Tuesday that they will face charges of criminal negligence causing death almost exactly three years after Lisa Shore died at the Hospital for Sick Children.

"I'm outraged that the nurses are being charged in this case," said lawyer Elizabeth McIntyre.

"There are proceedings before the College of Nurses [of Ontario] scheduled to commence in December."

"That's the appropriate forum to look at standards of nursing practice."

The two nurses, along with nurse educator Mary Douglas and chief of nursing, Dr. Jean Reeder, have taken the unusual step of asking the college of nurses to investigate the allegations made against them last year when a coroner's jury declared Lisa's death a homicide.

If convicted of criminal negligence, the nurses could face a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Frank Gomberg, the Shore family's lawyer, said police haven't yet told him about any impending charges. But he took issue with Ms.

McIntyre's complaints about police involvement in the case.

"That's ridiculous," Mr. Gomberg said. "Who is she to say it's outrageous?"

"If you sat there at the inquest and listened to what the jurors were saying, not only is it not outrageous, but it's perfectly predictable. It would be surprising if criminal charges weren't laid."

One juror at the inquest into Lisa's death, Lawrence Dillon, had told presiding coroner Dr. Jim Cairns that he had grave misgivings about the testimony of hospital staff.

"To me, this sounds like a cover-up," Mr. Dillon said at the time of the inquest. "We've been given a smoke screen."

The five-member coroner's jury ruled in February, 2000, that the cause of Lisa's death was a complex drug interaction leading to cardiac and respiratory arrest. She died on Oct. 22, 1998, eight hours after being admitted for chronic leg pain related to her rare, non-fatal condition of reflex sympathetic dystrophy.

Hospital staff attached Lisa to a morphine pump to control the pain. Because of her condition, Lisa had also been taking a medication known to heighten the sedative effects of morphine.

The two nurses testified at the in-



Lisa Shore, 10, died three years ago in a Toronto hospital where she was being treated for leg pain. An inquest declared her death a homicide.

quest that they used a monitor to keep track of the girl's condition during the night. But Lisa's mother, Sharon Shore, was sleeping nearby and testified no such device was installed. The girl was dead in the morning.

Toronto police and the area's senior Crown attorney, Paul Culver, would not comment on the case yesterday.

If charges are laid, this would be the first time Canadian nurses have faced criminal-negligence charges, Ms. McIntyre said.

"It's going in exactly the wrong direction in dealing with issues of errors that happen in the health-care system," Ms. McIntyre said. "Are nurses going to have to go to work every day with the prospect of criminal charges if something goes wrong?"