

The Case of Edwin Jennings

Edwin Jennings was a beloved father, husband and proud World War II Veteran who died under suspicious circumstances at Spectrum Health-Kent Community Campus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on March 3, 2005.

For months prior to his death, Edwin's family had filed numerous complaints about the abuse and neglect that occurred there with both the State of Michigan and with the area's long-term care ombudsman, Citizens for Better Care (CBC).

When Edwin died, his family members' suspicions only intensified. So they immediately requested a complete, independent autopsy be performed by the Kent County Medical Examiner's Office to determine the cause and manner of death.

What really happened to Edwin?

Edwin Jennings died on March 3, 2005, and to date, his family's questions remain unanswered. In May 2005, the family was forced by Spectrum Health to open an unnecessary Probate Estate in order to obtain Edwin's "complete" autopsy report and medical records. Spectrum Health's so-called "complete" autopsy report had no cause of death, no manner of death, and no certifying signatures of the Kent County Medical Examiner, attending physician or any other pathologist. Also, the descriptions of the body in the autopsy report contained numerous discrepancies.

After Edwin's family received the autopsy report in May 2005, they kept asking questions and only continued to get the run around from Spectrum Health, the State of Michigan, Kent County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Stephen Cohle and the entire staff at the Kent County Medical Examiner's Office. In August 2005, Edwin's family decided to exhume Edwin's body for a second autopsy as a last resort – in order to get their questions answered.

During the second autopsy by an out-of-state forensic pathologist, Edwin's family was horrified when they were told that Edwin's brain had been taken and kept without the family's knowledge during the initial autopsy performed at Spectrum Health. This "taking and keeping" of the entire brain and for what purpose, had never been noted on the supposed "complete" autopsy report that Edwin's family received from Spectrum Health.

Since Edwin died in March 2005, his family has **never** been able to obtain the information listed below, despite their repeated requests and having all the necessary legal authority to do so:

- Certified copies of Edwin's complete medical records.
- Certified X-ray films from the past year of Edwin's life.
- Certified copy of Edwin's complete autopsy report from the Kent County Medical Examiner's Office that lists the cause of death and the manner of death, and that has the certifying signatures of the Kent County Medical Examiner and attending physician.

In addition, no certified physical evidence – i.e., toxicology reports, specimen slides, radiographs, etc. – has ever been produced from the initial, complete autopsy that Edwin's family requested in March 2005 to determine the cause and manner of death.

Edwin's family has never been allowed to talk to any of the doctors listed on the autopsy paperwork from Spectrum Health – nor to Dr. Stephen Cohle, Kent County Chief Medical Examiner/Spectrum Health forensic pathologist or Dr. David Start, Kent County Deputy Chief Medical Examiner/Spectrum Health forensic pathologist. The family has also never been able to talk to Dr. James McConnell, the Spectrum Health clinical pathologist/cytopathologist who supposedly did the initial autopsy on Edwin.

To this day, Edwin's second autopsy cannot be completed. His cause of death and the manner of his death remain unknown. Spectrum Health officials continue to change their statements about where Edwin's initial autopsy was actually performed. Edwin's family has never been able to find out what actually happened to his brain, nor have they been able to find out what information was obtained from taking it.

The cloud that hangs over Edwin's suspicious death, and the system that prevents this family from getting answers and closure, gives all dedicated doctors, nurses and other forensic pathologists a bad name. The state and federal laws that govern medical records and the disposal of body parts during autopsies must be changed so that families' rights are protected.

Until this conflict of interest is resolved, no family in Kent County will ever be able to get a complete, independent autopsy by the County Medical Examiner's Office to determine the real cause and manner of death of their deceased loved ones – especially for those who die in Spectrum Health facilities.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- In Michigan, Public Act 181 requires that the Medical Examiner's Office must investigate all deaths that occur under unusual or suspicious circumstances.
- State law also mandates that autopsy reports be filed at the County Medical Examiner's Office and be made available at little or no cost to the next-of-kin. Why is Edwin's autopsy not on file at the Kent County Medical Examiner's Office then?

When will legislators and politicians quit supporting this system and give us back our rights?

At this point, Edwin's family is asking anyone in Kent County and in the State of Michigan to write and call their local, state and federal legislators and politicians and ask them why they continue to support this system that takes away families' rights.

- *Every family should have the right to know the truth about what really happened to their loved one in a nursing home and/or hospital.*
- *Every family should have the right to obtain all medical records for their deceased loved one in a nursing home and/or hospital.*

- *Every family should have the right to get an independent, complete autopsy on their deceased loved one to determine their cause and manner of death.*
- *Every family should have the right to decide whether or not to bury their deceased loved one with all of his/her body parts.*

RELATED MEDIA LINKS – EDWIN’S STORY

- *Local Area Watch (LAW)*
This Web site has covered Edwin’s case, unlike Grand Rapids’ mainstream media. There are numerous postings about Edwin and the glaring conflict of interest that exists at the Kent County Medical Examiner’s Office and Spectrum Health.
<http://www.localareawatch.org>
http://www.localareawatch.typepad.com/the_local_area_watch/2006/01/kent_county_med.html
http://www.localareawatch.typepad.com/the_local_area_watch/2006/09/county_silences.html
- *WWMT News 3 Special Report – “The Missing Brain”*
Channel 3 aired Edwin’s story on February 2, 2006.
http://www.wwmt.com/engine.pl?station=wwmt&id=23329&template=breakout_local.html
- *WXYZ-Channel 7 -- “Stolen Body Parts”*
Recognized as one of the more aggressive TV news stations in the state, Channel 7 aired Edwin’s story on May 7, 2006.
- *Not Just Numbers*
<http://www.safetyforum.com/njn/>