

State

Nursing home investigated

Murder by fraud charged

United Press International
GALVESTON — A Galveston County grand jury returned 38 indictments charging a Houston-based nursing home and eight of its former and present employees with murder by fraud for the deaths of eight patients at a Texas City nursing home.

Tuesday's indictments replace 23 indictments handed down in March by another grand jury against Autumn Hills Convalescent Center Inc. The employees named in the indictment are charged with the deaths of one man and seven women during a 13-month period from March 7, 1978 to April 5, 1979.

The grand jury described what it had learned as a "horror story."

Galveston County District Attorney James Hury said the new indictments are "more complete" than the original ones and will strengthen the state's case against the defendants. The case is expected to go to trial in October.

"The idea of what happened has not changed, but there are certain other avenues to reach the same conclusion," Hury said Tuesday.

The case is the first murder prosecution of a corporation in the country's history. The new legal strategy alleges the defendants fraudulently appropriated government funds for medical care that

was not delivered, which prosecutors claim was an act "clearly dangerous to human life."

The new indictments, totaling about 1,200 pages, named the Autumn Hills Convalescent Center Inc., three present employees and five former employees as defendants.

Austin attorney Roy Minton, representing the home and four of the employees, said his clients will plead innocent. Lawyers said it is the first case they've heard of where the murder was based on a non-violent felony.

Eight of the 38 indictments named the convalescent center; eight were against Ron Pohlmeier, vice president in charge of operations of the corporation; eight against Mattie Locke, head nurse for the corporation; four against Virginia Wilson, nurse administrator; three against Cassandra Canlas, registered nurse;

three against Marie Ritchie, nursing administrator; two against Mary Wagner, registered nurse and one each against nurses Phyllis Daulong and Ann Wright.

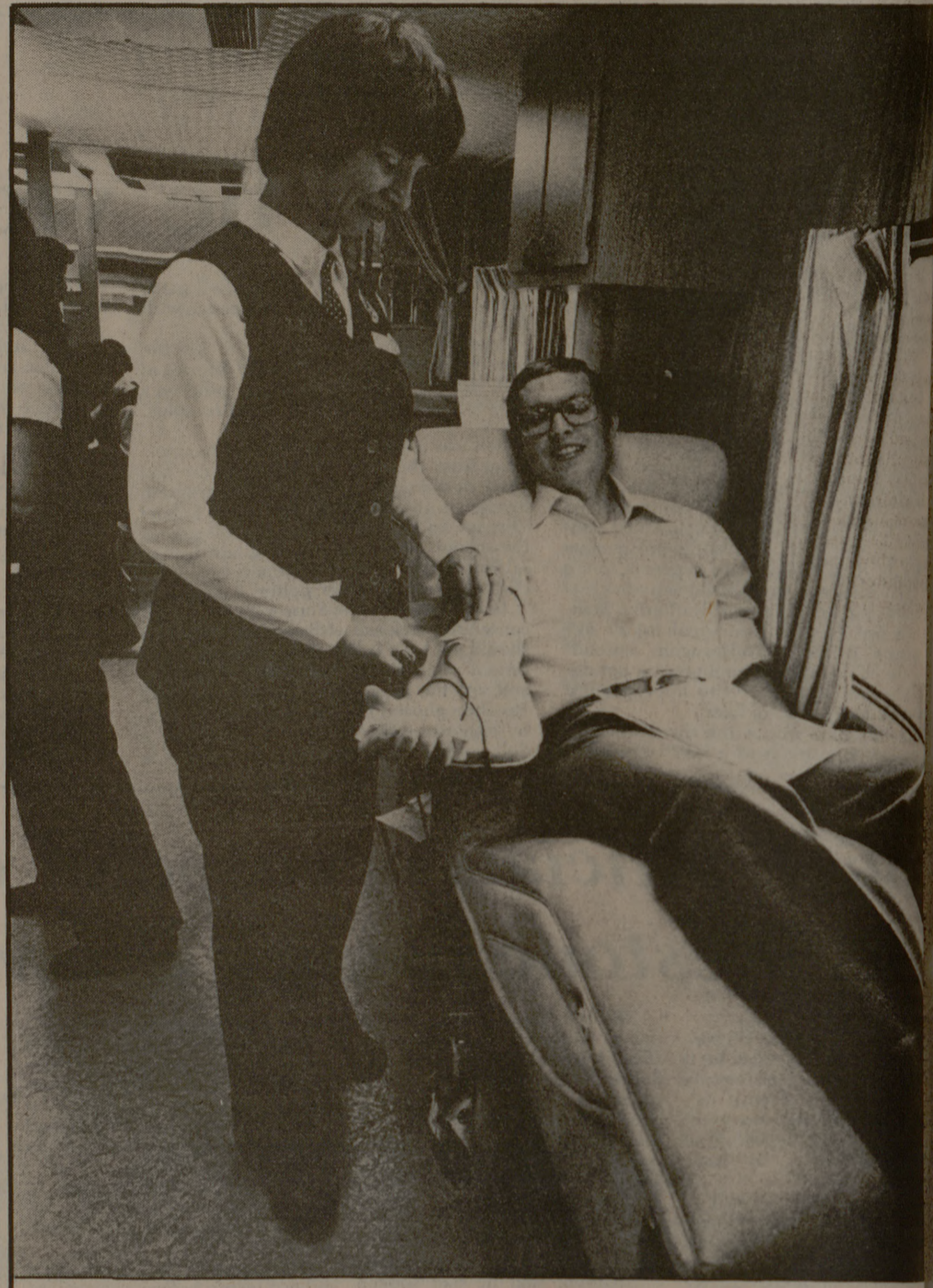
They are the same people named in the March indictments. The corporation was also charged with theft of state Department of Human Resources funds, specifically by depriving patients of care paid for by those funds.

The indictments charge that patient treatment charts, which must be maintained for the government, were falsified by officials to reflect that patients received meals, baths, medication to prevent bed sores and other care when, in fact, they did not receive such treatment at the 120-bed nursing home.

Autumn Hills officials denied they gave the eight patients substandard treatment and said a former disgruntled employee sparked the two-year investigation as retribution against her former employer.

If found guilty, the corporation faces a maximum fine of \$20,000 for each charge. The court also could demand that a notice be posted inside the nursing home indicating its conviction.

The patients who died were between 62 and 87 years old.



Staff photo by Greg Gamm

This won't hurt ...
Lyle Long, a registered nurse with Wadley Blood Bank, draws blood from Charles Farnsworth during the Student Government-sponsored blood drive. Two bloodmobiles, at Rudder Tower and the Commons dorms, are open from noon to 8 p.m. today. Each bloodmobile can handle four donors every 15 minutes, or a total of 128 persons a day.

TMC may get nuclear disposal

United Press International
HOUSTON — Faced with increased costs and problems in disposing of hazardous wastes, officials at the Texas Medical Center are studying the possibility of building an incinerator to dispose of its low-level nuclear waste products.
Dr. Jack K. Williams, executive vice president of TMC Inc., said Tuesday medical institutions in the 353-acre facility would need two or three incinerators to burn all kinds of waste.
Many hospitals in the area already have small incinerators which generally burn pathological

wastes but must contract for disposal of much of general, radioactive or other hazardous wastes. Officials estimated the cost of the incinerator might be less than \$2 million.
"This is a problem affecting every hospital," Williams said. "You cannot have modern medicine out radioactivity."
Earlier this year, TMC had stored 300 barrels of radioactive wastes in storerooms and vents, which was near the legal limit. Those have been destroyed by Nuclear Sources and Services Inc.

Mistake sets arsonist free early

United Press International
HUNTSVILLE — Bureaucratic red tape and a clerical foul up has resulted in the accidental release of an arsonist from the state prison.
Texas Department of Corrections officials said Tuesday they were searching for L.D. Eddings, released May 13 after serving just a few months of his six year sentence for arson.
Eddings was convicted in 1977 but remained free

on bond for four years pending appeals.
According to prison officials, when Eddings admitted to the Ellis Unit, two sets of papers accompanied him, one of which did not mention he had been free the four previous years.
The spokesman said that a clerk at the prison mistakenly assumed that Eddings had been reinstated during that time and computed his prison so that he was released just months after admission.

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