

NJ doctor in hepatitis B case fights for license

April 3 2009, By BETH DeFALCO , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Health inspectors described finding blood on the floor at the office of a New Jersey doctor whom they suspect is linked to a hepatitis B outbreak.

Regulators are holding a hearing Friday to decide whether to suspend Dr. Parvez Dara's (pah-VEHZ' DAHR'-uhz) license.

Nearly 3,000 of his [patients](#) have been warned to get tested. Five tested positive for the disease that is transmitted through exposure to infected blood.

Health inspectors say they found blood on the floor of a room where chemotherapy was administered and blood in a bin where blood vials were stored. They also found open medication vials, and unsterile saline and gauze.

Dara attorney Robert Conroy says there's no direct evidence the [hepatitis](#) cases are linked to Dara's office.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) - New Jersey officials have advised nearly 3,000 people who share a doctor to get tested after five cancer patients who visited the physician were found to have hepatitis B.

Two cases of hepatitis B were confirmed in late February as connected with the office of Dr. Parvez Dara, an oncologist with offices in Toms River and Manchester, near the Jersey Shore, Marilyn Riley, spokeswoman for the state Health Department, said Thursday.

Health officials recently learned of three more cases, all in Toms River, in which the patients were also under Dara's care.

"These were [older adults](#) who didn't have other risk factors, so that is what raised a red flag," Riley said.

Ocean County decided to send a letter to all Dara's patients dating to 2002. The March 28 letter warns them of the risk and suggests they be tested for the liver diseases hepatitis B and hepatitis C and for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Linda Bradford of Bayville said she's worried about her husband's health after hearing news of the outbreak.

"The first thing I did was call my husband," Bradford told WCBS-TV. "I was terrified. Oh my God, what's going on here?"

Hepatitis B is transmitted through exposure to infected blood, often by sexual contact or infected needles. Dara's office treats patients with blood disorders and cancer, some of whom receive chemotherapy there.

"The evidence that's available suggests the infections could be linked to the method the clinical staff used to administer injectable medications," such as chemotherapy, Riley said. "There's no evidence to suggest the medications were a problem."

Dara faces suspension of his medical license in connection with the outbreak and for other alleged health code violations. A hearing is

scheduled for Friday before the state Board of Medical Examiners.

Until then, he is performing only patient consultations, not procedures, said his lawyer, Robert Conroy. Neither of Dara's offices were open Thursday.

According to a report by the state epidemiology division, Dara has infection control violations dating to 2002, including violations of standards of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Conroy said that there is no proof the patients got the disease from Dara's office and that other factors aren't being considered. All five patients were also seen at Community Medical Center in Toms River, he said.

Health officials said they ruled the hospital out as a possible source of the infection.

Hepatitis B is transmitted through exposure to infected blood, often by sexual contact or infected needles.

Conroy said three patients were found to have dormant hepatitis infections that might have been noticed only after they started cancer treatments, which can suppress the body's immune system.

Because the patients live in the same area, he said, there could be another possible source.

"Absent any evidence, it is just as likely that those patients were infected (at) ... a common eatery," he wrote in a letter to the Medical Examiners Board.

Meanwhile, Conroy said Dara has received only support from his

patients.

"The doctor has never felt more appreciated by his patients than he does right now," he said.

Ocean County Health Department spokesman Edward Rumen said no new cases have been reported since the alert was issued.

Associated Press writer Bruce Shipkowski in Toms River contributed to this report.

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