Pioneering French oncologist Mathe dies at 88

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(AP) -- Oncologist Georges Mathe, who in 1959 performed the world's first bone marrow transplant, has died, the French president's office said Monday. He was 88.

Nicolas Sarkozy's office said Mathe died on Friday, but did not provide any additional details.

"His contribution to the progress of oncology remains major," the statement said. "In 1959, he performed the first bone marrow transplants on six Yugoslav physicians who had been accidentally irradiated at a nuclear power plant. Four of them survived."

Mathe was the first physician to use bone marrow transplantation to treat leukemia. The procedure involves giving patients a high dose of cancer drugs and radiation to kill leukemia cells. Transplanting bone marrow is also used to treat radiation and blood diseases including sickle cell anemia.

Mathe founded a specialized cancer center in the Paris suburb of Villejuif in the early 1960s and ran its blood disease unit until 1990, the statement said.

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