

French trial opens on cancer radiation scandal

September 24 2012

Two doctors and a radiophysicist went on trial Monday on manslaughter charges arising from radiation overdoses given to nearly 450 cancer patients in a French hospital.

At least seven people died as a result of overdoses administered to patients at the Jean Monnet hospital in Epinal in northeastern France between 2001 and 2006.

At least 24 people treated between May 2004 and August 2005 received 20 percent more radiation than they should have had due to a calibration error.

Another dysfunction led to 424 people being overdosed by between eight and 10 percent in the period spanning 2001 and 2006. Many of the victims were being treated for prostate cancer.

Scores of victims are due to testify from Monday until October 31, some of them by video-link because they are too ill to attend court.

"We want the guilty to be punished, I don't want my three sons to suffer the same fate," said plaintiff Michel Houot, speaking shortly before the trial began.

The two doctors, Jean-Francois Sztermer, 64, Michel Aubertel, 62, and radiophysicist Joshua Anah, 54, are accused of involuntary homicide, not helping people in danger and destroying evidence.

Three health executives are also in the dock on charges of failing to help people in danger.

The errors occurred in calibrating new machines acquired in 2004 and in the calculation of doses of radiation.

Michel Noel, 63, also said he wanted justice.

"My state of mind before the start of the trial is not good," said Noel, who underwent treatment at the general hospital for prostate cancer at the end of 2005.

"All that I hope for is that the officials accept their errors and are sentenced," he told AFP.

"I live with a pouch (that collects urine) and I cannot have sex," he said. "It's very difficult."

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