

For Listeria victims, sudden turns for the worse

By Dan Elliott
Associated Press

DENVER — Charles Palmer is a hardy 71-year-old former Marine and Vietnam veteran who trains cockatiels to say “Semper Fi” and “Whatcha doin’, man?”

He also loves fruit — and especially melon for lunch.

“He’s never one to get sick,” said his wife, Tammie.

The Colorado Springs man ate a cantaloupe that was purchased in mid-August, his wife said. Within several days, he was overcome by an excruciating headache. The next morning he was extremely weak and gripped by dry heaves, his wife recalled.

“I started slapping his face and saying, ‘You’ve got to talk to me,’ but he couldn’t,” she said.

She called 911. At the hospital, she said, he was diagnosed with the strain of Listeria blamed for a 19-state outbreak that has killed at least 15 and sickened at least 84.

Palmer’s story is shared by many who one day led normal lives and the next suffered agonizing symptoms, even death, from a pathogen that particularly afflicts the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. It can incubate for as long as two months before sickness sets in.

Symptoms can include fever, muscle aches, diarrhea and other gastrointestinal problems.

Health officials don’t identify victims by name, but The Associated Press has reached five families who have filed lawsuits saying a loved one was sickened by the strain of Listeria cited in the outbreak.

William Thomas Beach, of Mustang, Okla., was a feisty, funny man who once got thrown out of a community center because he got into a fight over politics while playing dominoes, one of his six daughters

said.

“Daddy hit him,” Debbie Frederick recalled with a chuckle. “He took his politics very, very seriously.”

During a doctor’s visit on June 8, his 87th birthday, Beach announced: “Today is my birthday, and I want a sucker,” Frederick said. The doctor’s staff presented him with three suckers bound with a ribbon.

In late August, Beach fell and couldn’t get up. His face was red and swollen and he had trouble breathing. He was hospitalized and sent home the next day when his breathing was under control, Frederick said.

“He was dancing in little circles with the nurse because he was so happy to be going home,” she said.

On Sept. 1, his 85-year-old wife, Monette, found him unresponsive on the floor; he was taken back to the hospital and died that day. A few days later, Oklahoma and federal health officials linked his illness to the Listeria outbreak, Frederick said. He had been eating cantaloupe for weeks.

Herbert Stevens, of Littleton, is a retired engineer for the U.S. Geological Survey. At 84, he could walk unassisted and get out with his wife to enjoy a concert, despite having had heart surgery 21 years ago and being on oxygen.

On Aug. 22, about 10 days after eating cantaloupe from a local grocery store, Stevens got weak and nauseous. He had tremors and chills, said his daughter, Jeni Exley. At the hospital, his temperature was 102.7 and he was immediately put on antibiotics.

A month later, he’s in a skilled nursing center. His spirits are good, although he’s weak and sleeps a lot, Exley said.

It’s too early to say what his prognosis is, his daughter said,

but he may need a walker to get around and could lose much of his independence.

“How much can an 84-year-old man’s strength come back after having a serious infection?” Exley said.

Clarence Douglas Wells of Catonsville, Md., was a retired Defense Department printer who liked to use pistachio nuts for poker chips when he played cards.

“And he was terrible at playing poker,” his daughter Donna Wells Lloyd said with a laugh. “He didn’t have a poker face.”

Wells, an 87-year-old widower, lived with Lloyd and her husband in Catonsville, outside Baltimore. He was a quiet man with a wry sense of humor, his daughter said.

He was hospitalized Aug. 25 after he retained so much fluid that he gained about nine pounds in three days, Lloyd said. When she visited him, he didn’t complain of discomfort, but she suspects he may have been holding back.

“He hated to be a burden on anybody,” she said.

On Aug. 31, he took a turn for the worse. By the time Lloyd reached his room, he was intubated, and although he was sedated, he was tugging on the tube, trying to remove it. When he grew calmer, Lloyd dashed home to change clothes. Before she could leave her house, hospital staff called to say his heart had stopped and doctors were trying to revive him. He died that day.

State and local health officials told the family about two weeks later that Wells had died from the Listeria strain in the national outbreak, Lloyd said.

“I was horrified,” she said, especially when she started calculating the odds. “I just couldn’t believe that we could have gotten one out of, what, a million and a half cantaloupes?”

She said health officials

haven’t identified how her father contracted Listeria. He had bought a cantaloupe at a produce stand, she said.

Wells was a news junkie who kept on top of food safety issues, his daughter said, and he wouldn’t have eaten cantaloupe if he had read about the outbreak.

“He dropped stuff from his diet right and left. He knew about everything,” she said.

Sixty-five-year-old Juanita Gomez of Angleton, Texas, was shaking, vomiting and sweating when her daughter, Rosa, arrived at her parents’ home the morning of Aug. 20, summoned by a phone call from her worried father.

“She looked like she was probably going to die,” the daughter said. “She wouldn’t respond to us. She looked right through us.”

The family took her to a hospital, but she was sent home that day with instructions to take Motrin and Tylenol, Rosa said. The next night, someone from the hospital called Rosa and told her to bring her mother back if she had not improved.

Juanita Gomez, who already suffered from diabetes and is in the early stages of dementia, spent the next three days in the hospital, the daughter said. She was released Aug. 24, the day before her 66th birthday.

Over the next few days, public health officials told the fami-



Associated Press

Donna Kay Wells Lloyd and her brother Clarence William Wells look at a photograph of their father, Clarence Wells, on Friday, in Catonsville, Md. The siblings say their father died Aug. 31 and health officials later told the family that he had the same listeria strain as the nationwide outbreak traced to Colorado cantaloupe.

ly Juanita had the same strain of Listeria as the national outbreak.

She is back home, although she suffered from diarrhea for several weeks and lost 10 pounds from her 4-foot-9 frame, family member said. The experience has unnerved the family, Rosa Gomez said.

“We make sure we wash everything but Listeria is not something you can look at and see. It’s really nerve-wracking,” she said.

In Colorado Springs, Charles Palmer is still hospitalized, and

though he can speak again, he’s weak and sometimes confused.

“He thought we were in Arizona a day or two ago,” his wife, Tammie, said.

She can still let loose a throaty, rumbling laugh when she relates her husband’s quirks. But a month into the ordeal, doctors still can’t tell her what the outcome will be, and she sometimes feels overwhelmed.

“I’m worn out,” she said. “It’s been a long haul. He’s got a long way to go.”

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Horowitz & Burnett, P.C. is searching for a Will executed by Dr. Michael von Gortler.

If you have any information, please contact J. Gregory McAuliffe, Esq., at 303-996-8600 or gmcauliffe@hblegal.net.

DOE, EPA, CDPHE Approve Rocky Flats CAD/ROD Amendment

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have approved an amendment to the Corrective Action Decision/Record of Decision for the Rocky Flats Site.

The Rocky Flats CAD/ROD was originally issued September 29, 2006, and the original response actions selected were institutional controls (ICs), physical controls, and continued monitoring. The CAD/ROD has been amended to clarify the description of certain ICs.

The CAD/ROD amendment also removes the requirement that any modification to ICs can be made only by a formal CAD/ROD amendment and provides that proposed changes to ICs in the future will follow the regulatory process in effect at the time of the proposal. In addition, the CAD/ROD amendment requires that the existing environmental covenant granted by DOE to CDPHE will be modified to reflect the IC clarifications and incorporates current Colorado law by providing for the use of either an environmental covenant or a restrictive notice.

The three agencies also approved a modification to Rocky Flats Legacy Management Agreement (RFLMA) that incorporates the IC clarifications and implements additional CAD/ROD amendment requirements.

A letter notifying the public of the release of the approved CAD/ROD amendment that explains the amendment in more detail is available on the **Community Involvement** page of the Rocky Flats website at http://www.lm.doe.gov/Rocky_Flats/Sites.aspx?view=5.

The CAD/ROD amendment and RFLMA are posted on the **Regulatory Documents** page on the Rocky Flats Site website at http://www.lm.doe.gov/Rocky_Flats/Regulations.aspx.

If you have any difficulty accessing the documents from the website, or have any other questions, please e-mail Bob Darr at bob.darr@lm.doe.gov, or call (720) 377-9672, to request assistance.

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