

OFFICIAL OF GUYANA TELLS OF AID OFFER

Medical Examiner Says U.S. Team Volunteered Autopsies Help, but No Assistance Came

By **LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN**

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ATLANTA, Feb. 17 — Guyana's chief medical examiner, Dr. C. Leslie Mootoo, said today that although he had been offered the assistance of American pathologists in doing autopsies and toxicologic tests on the 913 members of the People's Temple who died at Jonestown last November, no such help came.

Dr. Mootoo told a medical meeting that the Chicago Medical Examiner, Dr. Robert Stein, in a telephone call immediately after news of the mass deaths broke, offered the assistance of a team of experts in identifying the dead and determining their causes of death. Dr. Mootoo said he relayed word of Dr. Stein's offer to Guyanese officials. Both Dr. Mootoo and Dr. Stein said independently that they heard nothing thereafter from Guyanese or American officials.

Dr. Mootoo said he "did not know" if Guyanese officials had asked the United States Government for the assistance of Dr. Stein's team or if Federal officials had declined to send American experts. The State Department said in Washington that it knew of no request for such help from Guyana.

Findings Are Presented

Dr. Mootoo spoke at an American Academy of Forensic Sciences meeting, where he presented the findings of his medical investigations into the deaths.

His one-hour presentation stunned many in an audience of 800 experts, including members of a team from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington. The Justice Department asked this team to do autopsies in this country last December on seven bodies from Jonestown.

Dr. Rudiger Breitenecker of Baltimore, a civilian pathologist who assisted the military team in those autopsies, said at the meeting that "those of us on the front line knew nothing" about Dr. Mootoo's scientific findings until today. Dr. Breitenecker also said that the seven autopsies were severely hampered by lack of crucial information that is routinely collected in medical-legal investigations but apparently was not collected by the American military team that removed the bodies from Guyana.

"We shuddered about the degree of ineptness," he said.

Dr. Breitenecker said he did not know until he met Dr. Mootoo that the Guyanese doctor had given samples and specimens from Jonestown to a representative of the American Embassy.

Dr. Mootoo's presentation, an unusual one for a scientific meeting, included pic-

tures of Jonestown and vivid descriptions of his personal reactions as the first doctor on the scene 48 hours after the deaths.

He said in an interview that had he stopped working in Jonestown after 32 hours because of fatigue and insufficient supplies of equipment and food. He said he and his three Guyanese assistants ran out of water and could not drink from the Jonestown wells for fear of poison.

Dr. Mootoo reported that tests of stomach contents from 81 bodies at Jonestown showed evidence of cyanide, and that additional tests showed another 83 people had been injected with cyanide. Circumstances did not permit more tests, he said.

Tests of syringes fitted with needles showed cyanide in large concentrations and also traces of Valium, a tranquilizer, he said. Tests on other syringes, without needles, showed far larger concentrations of cyanide.

Witnesses have said that cyanide was squirted into the throats of some cult members. Dr. Mootoo said the amounts of cyanide detected indicated that "you just needed a taste or a sip to die."