

TB Patient Under Quarantine Is Identified as Atlanta Attorney

The tuberculosis patient under the first federal quarantine since 1963 is a 31-year-old personal injury attorney who practices law with his father in Atlanta, a federal law enforcement official said Thursday.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to talk about the case, identified the patient as Andrew Speaker. A medical official in Atlanta also confirmed the name on condition of anonymity.

Mr. Speaker's new father-in-law is a microbiologist at the Centers for Disease Control specializing in the spread of TB. Bob Cooksey would not comment on whether he reported his son-in-law to federal health authorities. He said only that he gave Mr. Speaker "fatherly advice" when he learned the young man had contracted the disease.

In a statement issued through the CDC, Mr. Cooksey also said that neither he nor his CDC laboratory was the source of the TB bacteria that infected his son-in-law. The CDC had no immediate comment on how the case came to the attention of federal health authorities.

Mr. Speaker has a rare and dangerous form of tuberculosis that has proved resistant to drugs. He arrived at Denver's National Jewish Medical and Research Center for treatment Thursday after flying from Atlanta with his wife and federal marshals, hospital spokesman William Allstetter said.

Doctors plan to begin treating Mr. Speaker immediately with two antibiotics, one oral and one intravenous. He also will undergo a basic physical exam, a test to evaluate how infectious he is and a CT scan and lung X-ray, Mr. Allstetter said. Doctors hope to also determine where he contracted the disease.

He will be kept in a special unit with two rooms and a ventilation system. "He may not leave that room much for several weeks," Mr. Allstetter said.

According to a biography posted on a Web site connected with Mr. Speaker's law firm, he attended the U.S. Naval Academy, graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in finance, then attended University of Georgia's law school.

His father, Ted Speaker, unsuccessfully ran for a Fulton County Superior Court judgeship in 2004, the same year his son was admitted into the Georgia Bar.

Andrew Speaker recently moved from an upscale condominium complex in anticipation of his wedding, former neighbors said. He also wrote in an application to become a board member of his condo association that he was going to Vietnam for five weeks as part of the Rotary club to act as an ambassador.

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"He's a great guy. Gregarious," said Pam Hood, a former neighbor. "He's a wonderful guy. Just a very, very pleasant man."

In a phone interview with the Atlanta Constitution-Journal from an Atlanta hospital earlier this week, he explained that he knew he had TB when he flew from Atlanta to Europe in mid-May for his wedding and honeymoon, but that he didn't find out until he was already there that it was an extensively drug-resistant strain considered especially dangerous. Despite warnings from federal health officials not to board another long flight, he flew home for treatment fearing he wouldn't survive if he didn't reach the U.S.

Health officials in North America and Europe are now trying to track down about 80 passengers who sat near him on the two trans-Atlantic flights, and they want passenger lists from four shorter flights he took while in Europe. Patients on the shorter flights are not expected to be as much at risk, health officials said.

Among those being tested are more than two dozen University of South Carolina Aiken students, school spokeswoman Jennifer Lake said Thursday. Two were apparently sitting near him, possibly in the same row, she said.

One of those students, Laney Wiggins, said she is awaiting her skin test results, expected Friday. "I'm very nervous," she told a local newspaper. "It's kind of sad that this is overshadowing the wonderful time we had in Europe."

Mr. Speaker had flown to Paris on May 12 aboard an Air France flight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He and his bride also took four shorter flights while in Europe -- Paris to Athens on May 14; Athens to Thira Island May 16; Mykonos Island to Athens May 21; and Athens to Rome May 21. It was while they were in Rome that he learned further U.S. tests had determined his TB was the rare, extensively drug-resistant form, far more dangerous than he knew. Officials told him turn himself over to Italian health officials and not to fly on any commercial airlines. Instead, on May 24, he flew from Rome to Prague, then flew to Montreal and drove into the U.S., according to CDC officials.

Officials are trying to contact people who sat within five rows of him on the two longest flights for testing.

Other passengers are not considered at high risk of infection because tests indicated the amount of TB bacteria in the man was low, said Dr. Martin Cetron, director of the CDC's division of global migration and quarantine.

Mr. Speaker told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that he wasn't coughing and that doctors initially didn't order him not to fly and only suggested he put off his long-planned wedding. "We headed off to Greece thinking everything's fine," he told the newspaper.