

Trial will expose health flaws, union says

Ailing public system blamed as nurses charged in hospital death of 10-year-old

BY STEPHANIE CESCA

The hospital death of a 10-year-old girl should be blamed on an ailing public-health system where nurses are so stressed out they vomit after their shifts, the Ontario Nurses' Association said yesterday.

Lesley Bell, chief executive officer of the ONA, said in a telephone interview she believes the trial of two Toronto nurses charged with

criminal negligence causing death will only publicize an underfunded health-care system and erode the morale of the nursing profession.

"I don't think that criminal charges are going to fix the problems within the system today," Ms. Bell said. "Nurses everywhere are going to be outraged."

Yesterday Toronto homicide detectives laid the charges against Ruth Doerksen, 41, and Anagaile

Soriano, 25, after a 1½-year investigation into the death of Lisa Shore who died Oct. 22, 1998, after being admitted to the Hospital for Sick Children with a sore leg.

Frank Gomberg, the Shore family's lawyer, called the charges "appropriate." A conviction carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

"These two nurses will get a fair trial and they'll get fair treatment. That's a lot more than what Lisa Shore got," he said.

Mr. Gomberg said the trial will allow the Shore family to learn what really happened to Lisa.

But Ms. Bell said the case is an

example of how nurses are victims of a system that makes it difficult to provide adequate patient care.

"They're throwing up in parking lots ... just grateful that nobody died on their shift," she said.

Ms. Bell said she's also concerned the charges will have a chilling effect on the nursing profession, generating a fear to go to work every day.

Elizabeth McIntyre, who is Ms. Soriano's lawyer, said both accused are "dismayed that the charges are being pursued" and said they will be defended vigorously.

Lisa, who suffered from reflex sympathetic dystrophy, a non-fatal condition, was admitted to the hospital, attached to a morphine pump. She died eight hours later.

Owing to her condition, she was taking another type of medication at the time, known to heighten the effects of the morphine.

An inquest that concluded in February, 2000 heard conflicting testimony between hospital staff and Lisa's mother, Sharon Shore, about whether Lisa was hooked to a monitoring machine.

The jury ruled Lisa's death a homicide, a term that recognizes

human error as the cause of death, but does not assess blame.

Mrs. Shore, who has persistently demanded a criminal investigation into the case since the homicide ruling, said she and her husband Bill would not comment on the charges as they will be witnesses at the trial set to begin Nov. 22.

A Web site she has dedicated to the case has been taken down until the trial is over.

Meanwhile, the College of Nurses of Ontario, which licenses 140,000 nurses in the province, has not decided yet whether to postpone its own hearing into the case.