

## Ruling in death challenged

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The director of Orange County Emergency Medical Services has challenged the county medical examiner's ruling that a handcuffed suspect suffocated because paramedics strapped him facedown on a stretcher.

Dr. Salvatore Silvestri has requested a second opinion in the autopsy ruling that said positional asphyxia killed Gordon Randall Jones on July 19.

Silvestri oversees paramedics at most Orange agencies that transport patients, including Health Central's Quality and Physicians Services, which transported Jones after he became combative and was shocked 13 times with a Taser stun gun by Orange deputy sheriffs. "I frankly think the report is inaccurate," Silvestri said Tuesday.

The autopsy report said Jones, 37, could not breathe because he was lying on his stomach. The report also said cocaine and the shocks contributed to his death.

In a Sept. 24 letter to Chief Medical Examiner Shashi Gore, Silvestri said the restraints allowed Jones enough mobility to lift his head, shoulders and upper torso.

Silvestri also questioned why cocaine toxicity was ruled out as the cause of death.

He based his opinion on the autopsy report, hospital records and interviews with EMS crews involved in the transport from the Rosen Plaza Hotel on International Drive.

During the transport to Sand Lake Hospital, Jones tried to bite, spit and scream at the crew, Silvestri wrote.

When Jones became severely agitated and stopped breathing, a paramedic turned him on his back and resuscitated him, Silvestri wrote. Jones remained on his back in the ambulance. He died in the emergency room.

Dr. William Anderson, the former deputy chief medical examiner for the Orange-Osceola Medical Examiner's Office who performed the autopsy, defended his findings.

"The straw that broke the camel's back was strapping him down in the first place," said Anderson, now a pathologist at the Sarasota-Manatee-DeSoto Medical Examiner's Office.

He said cocaine could not have been the cause of death.

"If he had a cocaine level high enough to stop the heart, it would have stopped it permanently," Anderson said. "But he was resuscitated."

Anderson said he watched the hotel security tapes and that Jones did not appear too agitated while being strapped down. Jones most likely became agitated as he began losing his ability to breathe, Anderson said.

Because Jones was resuscitated after being placed on his back, it strengthens the argument that he died of positional asphyxia and not a cocaine overdose, Anderson said.

"They didn't bring the level of cocaine in his system down, but they got him in a position where he could breathe again," Anderson said. "That was the only change. By that time, it was too late."

Sheri Blanton, administrator at the Medical Examiner's Office, said changing an autopsy ruling is rare. Gore, she

said, would consider ordering a second opinion when he returns from a medical examiner's conference Thursday.

Since Jones' death, Silvestri is considering adding a written policy on restraining and transporting combative patients to the county's medical-treatment policy for paramedics.

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