Former Body Parts Harvester Sentenced To Prison

He falsified medical records of cadavers so tissues could be sold for transplant

Mike Baker, Associated Press Writer

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A former North Carolina body parts harvester was sentenced to eight years in prison Monday for what prosecutors described as a heinous fraud scheme in which he falsified medical records of cadavers so tissues could be sold for transplant.

Philip Guyett Jr., 42, pleaded guilty to three counts of mail fraud in March. Prosecutors said he went to great lengths to conceal medical problems of cadavers he gathered in Las Vegas and then in Raleigh, using fake blood samples and hiding details about cancer, drug use or a case of hepatitis C.

Investigators said Guyett showed no respect for the bodies he was entrusted to handle, and one sobbing woman at the sentencing yelled across the quiet courtroom, "He's a butcher!" Guyett broke into tears several times, declaring that he had made a "dumb decision" in trying to get rid of tissues as his business was failing.

U.S. District Court Judge Earl Britt showed no sympathy. He went above the sentencing guidelines while blasting Guyett for his questionable testimony on the stand and for actions that inflicted clear emotional distress on victims. Britt also stunned the courtroom by immediately sending Guyett into custody, dismissing his emotional request for time to say goodbye to his two young children.

Guyett said he assumed that processors and other medical experts would catch any problems with the tissues he was providing, which prosecutors disputed.

"He was on the front lines of quality control," said Jason Cowley, the assistant U.S. attorney handling the case. "The whole system relies on people like him to be honest, truthful and forthcoming in the process."

Guyett's case, along with another tissue procurement investigation in New Jersey, heightened concerns about an industry that has long relied on the honesty of its workers.

Prosecutors said Guyett's bodies produced 2,600 tissue products, with 785 of those implanted into humans. They argued that 127 patients received tissue from donors with questionable medical histories and at least one victim contracted a staff

infection that his doctor believes was linked to Guyett's unsanitary procurement of tissue.

Betty Ogletree, 71, of Fort Valley, Ga., said she suffered complications following a surgery in 2004 that she believes were linked to Guyett.

"I feel like I'm a prisoner in my own home because I can't go anywhere and can't do anything unless someone carries me," said Ogletree, who was brought to the courtroom in a wheelchair.

And Jennifer Stainback, 29, of Raleigh, said Guyett claimed in 2004 that her father's body would be used for cancer research after he died of lung cancer. She said she now has recurring nightmares about how her father's body was handled.

"Please, please put him away (in prison). Nobody like that should be out on the streets. That's a monster," she said.

As Stainback left the stand, a weeping Rhonda Fleming, 44, called Guyett a "butcher." She believes Guyett used her brother's body after he died in 2005.

Federal investigators said Guyett received $3,000 to $7,000 for each body he harvested. Guyett said his business was failing in 2005 when he realized he needed to get rid of the tissues remaining in his possession.

"It was a dumb decision, but it was a decision I made," Guyett said as he started to weep.

Federal regulators shut down Guyett's Donor Referral Services Inc., in 2006, citing inaccurate paperwork and poor record-keeping.

The Food and Drug Administration said in 2007 it rushed inspections on all 153 companies that recover cadaver parts and found no major problems. Regulators oversee some 2,000 business that handle tissues and generally only inspect a few hundred each year.

More than 1.3 million procedures each year use tissue from donated cadavers in what has become a billion-dollar industry.

U.S. Attorney George Holding said Guyett's case should serve as an example for those in the industry who handle such sensitive material.

"This is a heinous crime," he said. "A tremendous number of people were impacted by this and they will be impacted for years to come.

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