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# Hospital Reopens After Germ Search

## Investigation into worker's death continues

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A day after the city's first inhalation anthrax victim was laid to rest, the Manhattan hospital where she worked was reopened and deemed safe for staff and patients.

Meanwhile, law enforcement officials said they were reconstructing Kathy Nguyen's final days, using her MetroCard and telephone records to trace the anthrax infection that killed her.


Kathy Nguyen

Nguyen, 61, a Vietnamese immigrant who worked as a storeroom clerk at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, was diagnosed with inhalation anthrax on Oct. 30. The Upper East Side hospital where she had worked for 10 years was immediately shut down. Nguyen died the next day, leaving officials with little information on her private life, which has now become the subject of a national investigation.

During a news conference yesterday, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said environmental tests at the hospital and Nguyen's South Bronx apartment had come back negative for anthrax. Although the investigation is continuing, the mayor admitted there is a possibility the source of Nguyen's exposure won't ever be found.

"We're working on leads. I don't know if I can describe them as promising," Giuliani said. "The FBI and the police and the Department of Health still have to try to run down and establish where it occurred. I don't know if they'll be able to do that."

Officials from the FBI-NYPD Joint Terrorist Task Force are reconstructing Nguyen's life using her MetroCard, the prepaid ticket used to travel on the city's bus and subway system. Other clues to her death include telephone bills and information gleaned from hundreds of interviews with co-workers and neighbors.

The investigation's focus is the period between Oct. 15 to Oct. 22, when officials believe she was exposed to the bacteria, Deputy Chief Joseph Reznick said.

Rumors that Nguyen worked a second job at a neighborhood restaurant turned out to be untrue, Reznick said.

"This is like a mystery of mysteries," Reznick said. "Right now, in the hospital and her residence, everything has come back negative, so we think it's in our best interests to look elsewhere."

However, Reznick, a member of the task force, is not sure where to turn. "Other than what an ordinary 61-year-old hospital worker who lives alone, unmarried, would do, we're coming up with nothing uncharacteristic of that sort of person," Reznick said. "We're kind of stumped."

City Health Commissioner Neal Cohen said no other New Yorkers had shown symptoms of inhaled anthrax and said he was confident the department had not overlooked any other cases in the city.

For those who worked closely with Nguyen, returning to the hospital was difficult. Joseph Kreytak, who also works in the hospital storeroom, said he was "a little shaken up after the loss of Kathy."

"It's sad coming back to reality, knowing that she worked with me side by side. Now that she's not here anymore, it's going to be rough," he said.

Police ask anyone with information about Nguyen during the Oct. 15-22 time period to call 212-384-8309 or 212-384-8965.

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