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Report Says Author Died of Complications From Anesthesia

By ANTHONY RAMIREZ

Olivia Goldsmith, the author of the satirical novel that became the successful Hollywood movie "The First Wives Club," died of cardiac arrest while under sedation for cosmetic surgery, the office of the chief medical examiner said late yesterday. While not attributing negligent conduct, the office noted that the death resulted from "a known complication" of the anesthesia and other treatment that involved four drugs that the examiner identified.

The finding appeared to be little different from initial reports months ago that Ms. Goldsmith, 54, died from anesthesia before surgery at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, but Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the medical examiner, noted the "known complication" finding. She did not comment on the foreseeable consequences of the physicians' use of the drugs.

Ann Silverman, a spokeswoman for Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat, declined to comment on the medical examiner's finding, citing patient-confidentiality rules. But she says a report addressing what the state's Health Department called "a statement of deficiencies" has been submitted to Health Department officials, as required.

Ms. Borakove said the office's finding yesterday was different from its June 14 finding in the case of Susan Malitz, a 56-year-old Connecticut woman. Ms. Malitz died as she was being prepared for cosmetic surgery in February, a month after Ms. Gold-



Olivia Goldsmith, 54, died in January after being prepared for cosmetic surgery.

smith had been treated at the same hospital.

In that case, Ms. Malitz's death appeared to be an accident. She was given an anesthesia injection in the wrong part of her neck.

Ms. Borakove declined to elaborate on the "known complication."

"We are not making judgments," she said. "We are just saying this is what we found." Ms. Goldsmith "went into cardiac arrest and stopped breathing while under general anesthesia. That's it. After that, it's up to other people to decide what

was done wrong or what was done right. That's not our call to make, ever."

She did not say why the investigation was lengthy, the finding coming more than five months after Ms. Goldsmith's death. Ms. Borakove said the investigation had required extensive toxicological and laboratory work.

Ms. Goldsmith, born Randy Goldfield, entered the hospital for a chin tuck on Jan. 7. During preparation for surgery, she suffered cardiac arrest, went into a coma and was taken to Lenox Hill Hospital, where she died on Jan. 15.

Steven Mintz, a lawyer representing the estate of Ms. Goldsmith, said no decision had yet been made on litigation but that the medical examiner's finding was "another piece of the puzzle." He said that Ms. Goldsmith's family would not be immediately available for comment.

The examiner's finding follows a blistering report on the case, completed April 29, by the state Health Department.

Last month, the department fined Manhattan Eye Ear and Throat the \$20,000 maximum for what the department called "serious breakdowns in patient care," including failure to monitor Ms. Goldsmith's breathing with either a stethoscope or electronic monitors loud enough to be heard in the operating room.

Ms. Goldsmith's surgeon, Dr. Norman Pastorek, also did not return calls seeking comment.

In the Health Department report, investigators mentioned, without

A finding in one of two similar deaths at a hospital.

elaboration, an "incomplete" pre-operative history and physical for Ms. Goldsmith. The history and physical, the report said, "did not address the patient's significant health history."

In its finding yesterday, the medical examiner said the cause of death was "cardiorespiratory arrest during facial cosmetic surgery under sedation" using four drugs. The office identified them as meperidine, promethazine, propofol, and fentanyl.

Although their exact uses in Ms. Goldsmith's case are not publicly known. Meperidine and fentanyl are used to treat chronic pain and are known as narcoanalgesics. Promethazine is an antihistamine, and propofol is a general anesthetic.

Meperidine, which goes by the brand name of Demerol, is a sedative, according to the maker's Web site, <http://www.meperidine.com>.

The Web site notes special precautions for patients with liver or kidney disease, a history of alcoholism or seizure disorders, lung or thyroid disease, heart disease or urinary problems. Fentanyl Web sites have a similar list of precautions.

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