

Father of Jehovah's Witness teen wants charges against lawyers in her death

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TORONTO (CP) - A Calgary father whose daughter, a Jehovah's Witness, died after refusing blood transfusions for leukemia is making a last-ditch quest for what he considers justice.

Lawrence Hughes stood outside the Toronto offices of the Law Society of Upper Canada on Friday to declare he's pressing ahead with lawsuits against the religious order and two of its lawyers.

"I want justice for Bethany," Hughes told a news conference. "But most of all I want to prevent this from happening to other families and to other children."

Bethany Hughes died of acute myeloid leukemia in September 2002. Alberta Children's Services assumed custody of the 17-year-old when she refused blood and she was eventually given 38 transfusions.

In an unusual twist to a long-running case, Hughes said he wants the RCMP to lay charges against Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society lawyers David Gnam and Shane Brady, whom he accuses of interfering with Bethany's care.

"I want the Watch Tower lawyers . . . charged with the murder of my daughter, Bethany," Hughes said. "They lied to her. They convinced her that arsenic would cure her and was curing her."

Hughes claims, among other things, that Bethany was convinced to pull the medical tubes from her arms while in hospital.

Legal actions he launched on his own behalf, in particular against the Watch Tower, were dismissed by a judge earlier this year.

Brady himself, interviewed from his office in Georgetown, Ont., brushed aside the allegations.

"Mr. Hughes has tried this stunt numerous times," said Brady. "Did he at least say that the thing was dismissed in court last week, all of these accusations?"

"It's all gone. There's nothing left."

Brady quoted the judge's ruling which noted that Bethany's treatment was acceptable.

Jehovah's Witnesses consider it to be against God's wishes for one person to take blood from another.

Hughes blames the church for influencing his daughter to believe blood transfusions were wrong and wouldn't help her.

"If the Watch Tower Society had left my daughter alone, she would have had a fighting chance to live," he said.

There were months of legal battles over the medical intervention in Bethany's care.

Her illness and death tore the family apart and renewed public debate over how to determine when a child should be able to choose medical care.

Hughes broke away from the church in order to get his daughter the necessary treatments and eventually divorced his wife Arliss, who is a devout Jehovah's Witness.

Last week, Hughes was dealt another blow in his efforts when he was removed as executor over his daughter's estate, thereby preventing him from using the estate to sue the religious order.

He said he intends to appeal both rulings and plans a protest Saturday outside the Watch Tower's Canadian headquarters in Georgetown, near Toronto.

"It's not over with," insisted Hughes. "Even if I did lose this lawsuit the war is not over. I'll never give up until there's justice."