

Japanese Doctor Arrested Over Suspected Mercy Killing

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TOKYO, Dec 4 (AFP) - Japanese police said Wednesday they had arrested a 48-year-old doctor on suspicion of mercy killing. Police arrested Setsuko Suda on suspicion of killing a 58-year-old comatose patient by injecting him with lethal muscle relaxant in 1998, when Suda was working for Kawasaki Kyodo Hospital, southwest of Tokyo.

"We suspect that she pulled out a tracheal tube from the patient and injected muscle relaxant with the certain intention of killing him," said a spokesman for Kanagawa Police Department.

Her conduct went beyond medical treatment and could only result in the patient's death, the spokesman said. Suda reportedly denied the allegation, saying she received consent from the patient's family.

"I pulled out the tube to give up treatment at the request of his relatives," Suda was quoted by police as saying, according to Kyodo News Agency.

"The drugs were administered to relieve pain and therefore were a medical practice," Suda said.

The patient's family, however, has denied making such a request, Kyodo said.

The patient was hospitalised after suffering from asthma in November 1998. When he was admitted to the hospital, his heart had stopped beating. In Japan, euthanasia is virtually a taboo subject and still widely seen as murder. According to court rulings, mercy killing is allowed only if no other medical treatment is possible and if the patient explicitly requests euthanasia.