



PBA BLASTS HOSP'S 9/11 HEALTH MONITORING

By **SUSAN EDELMAN** and **CARL CAMPANILE**

June 25, 2006 -- The nation's largest police union plans to launch its own medical registry to track cancers and other life-threatening diseases hitting 9/11 responders, saying the federally funded World Trade Center medical monitoring program has kept them in the dark.

"We need to find out what cancers and serious disorders are out there so we know what to look for," said Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. "Millions of dollars are being spent, and we're getting no information."

The PBA will soon post an online registry for cops who helped in the 9/11 rescue and recovery to record their cancers, heart attacks, kidney failure and other illnesses, Lynch said.

"We have deaths now. We can't wait for information that can save other lives," he said.

The PBA's registry aims to include ill responders like Joseph Wittleder, 44, an NYPD emergency-service detective who rushed to Ground Zero on 9/11 and spent 12 to 14 hours a day for the next five weeks digging in the toxic rubble.

The father of two toddlers, a nonsmoker, was diagnosed with kidney failure in 2002. A transplant with a kidney from his wife, Michele, was postponed this year when he came down with a severe lung disease.

He can't sleep lying down because of breathing difficulty and coughs up "bags of blood," his wife said.

"It's unbelievable that no one wants to acknowledge that guys are getting this sick from 9/11," she said.

Wittleder is set to get his first screening in the WTC program - which is led by Mount Sinai Hospital - next week and join the nearly 16,000 responders who have already done so, including 5,800 checked twice.

One sick responder told The Post he tried unsuccessfully to log his cancer with the program.

NYPD narcotics Detective John Walcott, 41, was diagnosed with acute leukemia in 2003 - two months after the WTC program gave him a clean bill of health, he said. When he called the program to report it, he said, the people who answered the phone repeatedly told him, "We're not keeping any stats on that."

Dr. Robin Herbert, incoming chief investigator and coordinator of the WTC monitoring, said the staff is instructed to record such updates. But the program - which has gotten \$68 million in federal funds - lacks data on cancers and other serious diseases, Herbert acknowledged. When a comprehensive health exam finds possible problems, like a growth, patients are referred to outside doctors for further tests.

The program asks patients to report back on their final diagnoses - but not all do, Herbert said. "I know we don't get all the information," he said.

David Worby, a lawyer for 8,000 cops, firefighters and others in a class-action suit against the city, said cancer has struck 300, including 35 who died. Worby said the data is available to authorities, but so far

none has asked for it.

Meanwhile, some responders never signed up for a screening, including Brooklyn NYPD Detective John Marshall, 46, who worked at Ground Zero three months and retired in 2002. The burly, 6-foot-6 smoker suffered a massive heart attack in 2003 and was recently diagnosed with throat and lymph-node cancer.

His wife, Debbie, called the city's WTC Health Registry, but said the interviewer merely told her a new questionnaire would be sent out.

"They didn't seem to care. That blew me away," she said.

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