



DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

**News Release**

**LINDA LINGLE**  
GOVERNOR

---

Mark J. Bennett, Attorney General  
Phone: (808) 586-1500  
Fax: (808) 586-1239

---

For Immediate Release: March 16, 2010

News Release 2010-04

**DAUGHTER PLEADS GUILTY TO MANSLAUGHTER  
IN ELDERLY MOTHER'S DEATH**

HONOLULU – A certified nurse aide pled guilty to manslaughter today for recklessly causing her mother's death through neglect.

If the case had gone to trial, the evidence would have shown that Nena Lopez, 50, inexcusably failed to provide basic geriatric care, and failed to seek appropriate medical attention for her mother, either of which would have staved off the massive infection that ultimately caused her mother's death.

Lopez's mother was 79 years old when she died from sepsis after a six-day stay in an intensive care unit. Lopez took her mother to the hospital on March 3, 2006, after her mother appeared to be suffering from respiratory distress. Hospital staff discovered that her mother had five substantial bedsores, three of which were so severe that the bones underlying the sores had begun to liquefy.

A bedsore is common vernacular for a condition that medical clinicians call decubitus ulcers. Decubitus ulcers develop mostly on skin that covers boney prominences, such as the lower back (sacrum), hips, and shoulder blades. The ulcers develop when constant pressure is placed on the skin for a prolonged period of time, and they are mostly associated with people who are unable to move without assistance. The ulcers are open wounds, and if left untreated, or if treated improperly, they serve as vessels for bacteria to enter the bloodstream. Once sufficient bacteria enters the bloodstream, and results in a serious infection, a patient can be diagnosed as septic. If the infection is too far along, as it was with Lopez's mother, the patient can die from septic shock – a massive organ failure.

Bedsore are almost always avoidable with proper care, including turning patients at regular intervals so that pressure on the skin is distributed evenly. The Honolulu medical examiner and geriatric care specialists believe that Lopez's mother must have been lying in the same position for hours at a time over the course of many weeks for the sores to have progressed to the severity that was discovered when she arrived at the emergency room.

Lopez worked full-time at a geriatric long-term care facility in Honolulu. Lopez cared for her mother at Lopez's Waipahu home, and the offense was unrelated to Lopez's work at the facility. However, Lopez had been trained in skin integrity through her employment at the facility, and knew the consequences of failing to reposition her mother at regular intervals and the consequences of her failure to provide and seek sufficient and timely medical care for her mother.

Under the terms of the plea agreement, Lopez will serve between thirty and ninety days in prison and will be placed on probation thereafter. Lopez will also be banned for five years to life from employment with any provider of Medicaid or Medicare services. Sentencing is scheduled for May 19, 2010, before the Honorable Glenn J. Kim.

To report fraud or abuse of dependent adults, call the Department of the Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit at 586-6390, or the Department of Human Services' Adult Protective Services hotline at 832-5115.

###

For more information, contact:  
Michael L. Parrish  
Director, Medicaid Fraud Control Unit  
(808) 586-1058  
[hawaiiag@hawaii.gov](mailto:hawaiiag@hawaii.gov)  
[www.hawaii.gov/ag](http://www.hawaii.gov/ag)