

Fla. Man Gets Deal in Dementia-Plagued Dad's Death

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) -- A man charged with killing his dementia-plagued father by dragging him into the ocean has reached a plea deal, his attorney said Thursday, in a case that illuminated the stresses faced by those who care for people with Alzheimer's disease.

Bobby Yurkanin, 53, of Fort Lauderdale, will plead guilty to second-degree manslaughter Friday in exchange for a sentence of no more than 15 years of probation, defense attorney Michael Weinstein said.

The deal still needs a judge's approval. Yurkanin had been charged with murder in the death of his 84-year-old father, Robert, more than two years ago.

The State Attorney's Office said it cannot confirm plea deals that have not been accepted, but Weinstein said his client was "elated."

"Bobby never, ever, ever would have harmed his father," Weinstein said. "What happened that day certainly was tragic, but it certainly wasn't intentional murder."

Yurkanin was the sole caretaker for his father and had cared for his dying mother before that. Numerous friends have described him as a loving, devoted son who did the best he could. Weinstein said an abusive childhood and years of round-the-clock caregiving contributed to a downward spiral and his client crumbled under the stress.

It came to a head June 15, 2007, when the elder Yurkanin pulled down his swimsuit on the beachfront outside the Fort Lauderdale condo he shared with his son. Witnesses said Bobby Yurkanin yelled and cursed at his father, then dragged him into the water.

In a struggle to put the shorts back on, witnesses claimed Robert Yurkanin's head kept bobbing below the surface, though Weinstein said it's not clear that's true. Bobby Yurkanin pulled his father out of the water but acted erratically after, telling a 911 dispatcher called by a bystander that no help was needed even as his father lay lifeless on the shore.

Witnesses also questioned why Yurkanin, a champion lifeguard for years, waited so long before administering CPR, and why he performed it for so little time. Some claimed he never gave CPR at all. And numerous people said they saw the son shuffle over marks left in the sand from dragging his father in an apparent attempt to cover them up.

The father died a day later and an autopsy ruled it the result of complications from a near drowning.

The Alzheimer's Association estimates 5.3 million Americans are living with the disease, though some counts put that number lower. Millions more live with other types of dementia. Outreach to family members who care for such patients has increased along with awareness of the stresses they face.

"I think that the country is going to start seeing the unbelievable toll that Alzheimer's and dementia takes on caregivers," Weinstein said. "And caregivers have to know when to ask for help."