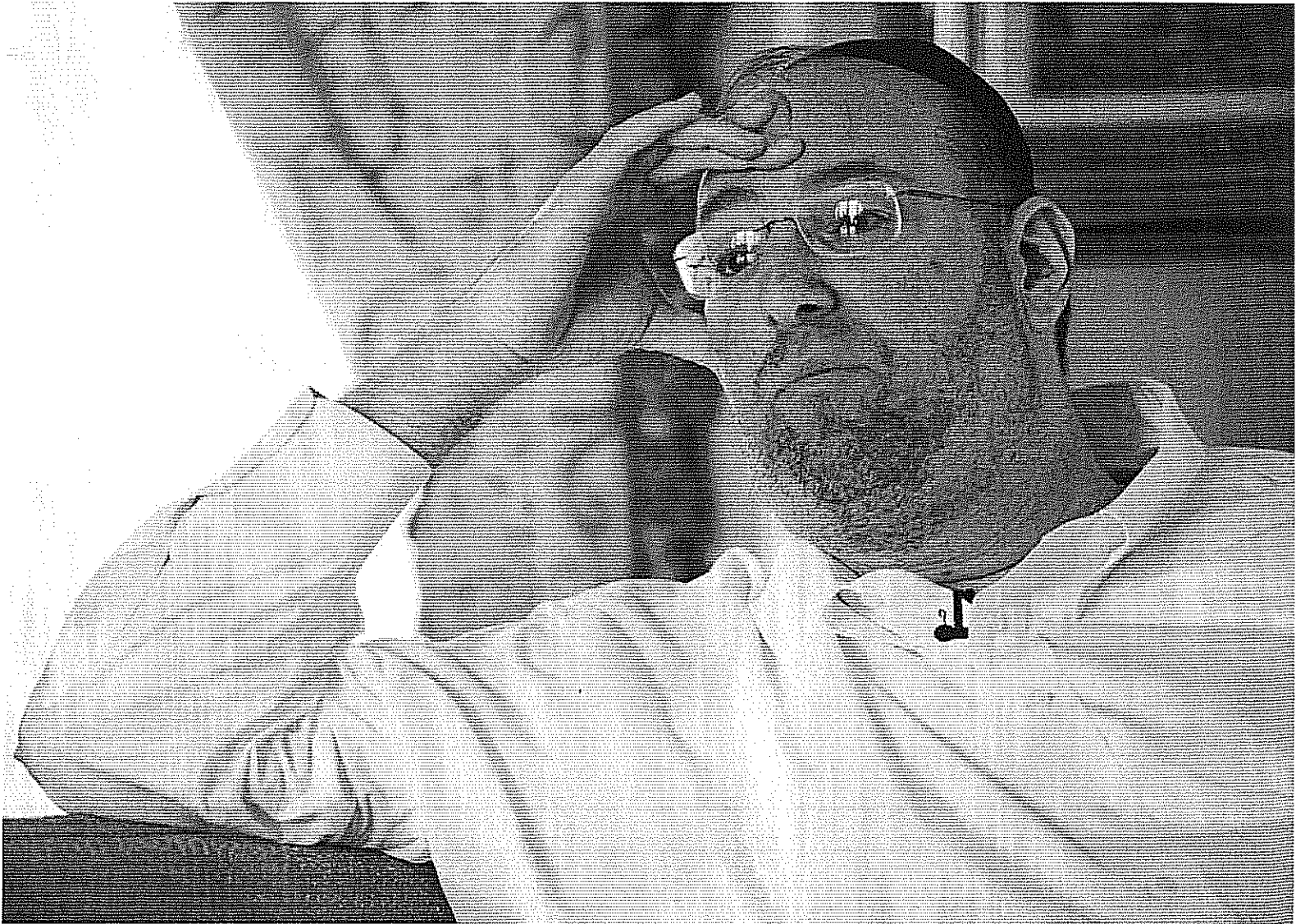


Charges filed in south state nursing home death



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A Southern California nursing home owned by the state's largest and most influential owner is in the crosshairs of California's attorney general, who has filed criminal charges against the facility and two of its nurses in connection with a resident's death.

Attorney General Kamala Harris announced Friday that Verdugo Valley Skilled Nursing & Wellness Centre in suburban Montrose faces involuntary manslaughter charges for its "grossly negligent" care of a burn-victim resident.

James Populus, who suffered burns over 90 percent of his body from an arson fire decades earlier, was not examined frequently enough by a doctor, despite his fragile health, according to the attorney general. Populus died in August 2014 after 14 months at the facility, which has become a frequent target of state and federal officials for alleged violations.

The state contends that the neglect at Verdugo Valley led Populus to suffer "severe weight loss, sepsis and pneumonia" and that he died of "multiple system failure due to sepsis," with infections throughout his body.

The state's action marks yet another blow for nursing home owner Shlomo Rechnitz of Los Angeles, whose facilities have faced increasing scrutiny in recent months from state and federal health regulators. Since October, the government has yanked certification from three Rechnitz nursing homes for alleged poor quality care.

Sallie Hofmeister, a Rechnitz spokeswoman, said an internal investigation found no basis for the allegations. Nevertheless, she said, the facility has increased training and oversight.

Earlier this month, Rechnitz gave up his ownership stake in a South Pasadena nursing home, where the police chief had complained for months about criminal activity in and around the facility. A new ownership group has stepped in, promising changes. The Montrose facility has had similar problems, according to elder-care advocates.

In pursuing a criminal case against Verdugo Valley, the AG's office said it also was filing charges of dependent adult abuse against the director of nursing, Alexiuse San Mateo, who "willfully permitted the patient's death." Consuelo Policarpio, a supervising nurse, is charged with dependent adult abuse causing great bodily injury.

San Mateo faces a possible nine years in state prison and a \$10,000 fine, while Policarpio faces a possible maximum of seven years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. Verdugo Valley LLC faces a possible \$10,000 fine and exclusion from any state- or federally-funded health

care programs.

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