

South Africa: Rath On Trial for Fraud in Germany

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Kerry Cullinan

Controversial vitamin seller Dr Matthias Rath has gone on trial for fraud in Germany after he convinced the parents of a boy with bone cancer to reject conventional medicine and use his "miracle cure" vitamin pills instead, according to the British Medical Journal (BMJ).

In this country, Rath claims that his vitamins can "reverse AIDS" and he encourages South Africans living with HIV not to go take "poisonous antiretroviral drugs".

Rath faces charges in a Hamburg court of falsely advertising his pills as a cure for cancer and contravening German laws by offering his vitamin products online without legal permission.

Nine-year-old Dominik Feld was diagnosed with cancer in the bone of his right thigh in 2002. A few months later, his parents stopped their son's chemotherapy and switched to Rath's vitamins. They also refused to allow doctors to amputate his leg which had become riddled with cancer.

However, doctors treating the boy were granted a court order allowing them, not his parents, to supervise his care in November 2003.

This order was overturned on appeal in March 2004 and Dominik was returned to his parents' care. He died in an alternative health clinic in November that year.

Describing chemotherapy as "outmoded and inhuman", Rath claims on his website that "Dominik did not die as a result of his cancer and metastasis of the lung, but rather as a result of a succession of medical errors made by doctors".

Rath adds that "it wasn't the cancer that eventually defeated him; he was the victim of an antiquated medical system -- one that wanted to exploit him to prove that cancer continues to be a death sentence."

Rath appeared briefly in the Hamburg court last week, but the case was postponed as the judge was ill.

Dominik's case received a lot of publicity in Germany and sales of Rath's vitamins plummeted after Dominik died, according to a former staff member.

Rath then came to South Africa and settled in Cape Town for a while where he linked up with prominent AIDS dissidents (people who don't believe HIV causes AIDS) to undermine antiretroviral (ARV) treatment.

He continues to promote his vitamins as an alternative to ARVs to South Africans with HIV through the SA National Civic Organisation.

He apparently enjoys the protection of both Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and her director-general, Thami Mseleku. Tshabalala-Msimang has refused to condemn Rath's activities, while Mseleku recently intervened to release a consignment of Rath's pills that had been seized by officials in Cape Town as they apparently contravened various regulations.

The health department's Charity Bhengu refused to comment on the matter.

At the time of going to press, the Rath Foundation in South Africa had not responded to requests for comment.