Acosta family still has questions about disappearance

By Anjali Pinto
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COLUMBIA — Little is known about what happened to Edward “Eddie” Acosta, 46, after he left University Hospital on the night of May 28.

A hiker found what are believed to be Acosta’s remains in a wooded area behind Rock Quarry Road on July 2. The following day, the Columbia Police Department also found his cell phone and hat nearby.

The site is about half a mile from University Hospital.

Friends and family of Acosta, from both Pulaski County and Dallas, have questions about what would cause Acosta — a veteran of both Gulf wars — to wander into the woods at night.

“It doesn’t make sense. Why would he head into the pitch dark?” said Everardo Acosta, who made the 10 1/2-hour drive from his home in Dallas to Columbia four times to lead searches for his brother.

But that’s just one of the family’s questions. They also want to know more about:

- the circumstances of Eddie Acosta's release from University Hospital without transportation
- the Truman Veterans Hospital's lack of records of Acosta, though he told a friend he would stay there overnight
- his state of mind when he left University Hospital grounds
- a reported sighting of him at a nearby Hampton Inn
As previously reported by the Missourian, a full autopsy report and definitive identification of the remains found in the woods will not be available for up to five more weeks. The Boone County Medical Examiner initially stated the body had injuries consistent with a fall, but the remains were sent to the MU Anthropology Department for further analysis because of their deteriorated condition.

**Released from hospital care**

Edward Acosta was first brought to Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital in Fort Leonard Wood at 1:20 p.m. after he showed signs of a stroke. He was stable enough to be transferred to University Hospital by ambulance, where he could receive treatment beyond what was available at the Leonard Wood hospital, Public Affairs Officer Carl Norman said.

Veterans who want treatment at the veterans hospital are often required to go first to University Hospital, said Gary Carmack, administrator for the Pulaski County Ambulance District.

"The VA Hospital does not want patients to come directly to their facility by ambulance," said Carmack, who dispatches ambulances that regularly transport patients from Pulaski County to surrounding hospitals in Springfield, Rolla, Osage Beach and Columbia.

"Veterans sometimes get mad at us because they want to be transferred directly to the VA hospital in Columbia," Carmack said. "But the VA will order us to go to an official emergency room."

After Acosta was discharged from University Hospital on May 28, he called friends and tried to get a ride home that night. When he couldn't find a ride, he told friends he would stay overnight at the veterans hospital and wait until someone could pick him up the next morning.

But the veterans hospital has no record of Acosta.

The last reported sighting of Acosta was by an employee of the Hampton Inn, 1255 Fellows Place, who notified the Columbia Police Department a week after Acosta's
disappearance — which by then had been publicized — that Acosta had been to the hotel on the night of his discharge from the hospital, inquiring about a room. He didn’t stay.

**No way home**

It upsets Acosta’s friends and family that he was allowed to leave University Hospital without a plan on how to get to his home in Laquey.

Matt Splett, media coordinator for MU Health Care, said University Hospital tries to help patients with transportation.

“If the patient indicates that they need assistance, the nursing staff or a social worker will help to arrange a form of transportation, such as a taxi,” Splett said.

The University Hospital procedure for dealing with an out-of-town patient is no different from the way they handle patients from Columbia. If the patient does not ask for assistance, he or she is free to leave after discharge, Splett said.

But a discharged patient without transportation or accommodations would be able to stay in the waiting room overnight, Splett said.

The veterans hospital does not routinely provide accommodations to nonpatients and had not been notified that Acosta might be transferred there, said Stephen Gaither, public affairs officer for the hospital.

“We’re a hospital, not a boarding home,” Gaither said.

Jeff Begins, a friend of Acosta’s from Crocker who helped look for his friend after his disappearance, takes issue with University Hospital’s policy. “The hospital said they are not in charge of providing transportation, but they are responsible for people’s well-being,” he said. "Why would they release a person without transport?"

**Eddie's health**

Everardo Acosta is concerned that his brother’s release from the hospital was premature.
"If he went from (Leonard Wood hospital to University Hospital) with symptoms of a stroke, they should have kept him there longer than a few hours," Everardo Acosta said. Eddie called a friend from University Hospital and said he would be monitored for a couple days. Not long after, Eddie called back and told the friend he was going to be released that night, Everardo Acosta said.

Everardo Acosta managed to get his brother's medical records from University Hospital with the help of the family lawyer. He said he turned the documents over to acquaintances in the medical field in Texas, who he hopes will help him understand his brother's medical condition that night.

So much doesn't make sense to Everardo Acosta. Why did his brother, who had his wallet with him and enough money to pay for a room, not stay at the Hampton Inn if he indeed went there and asked about a room?

"I can't get the police to give me video or photos of Eddie leaving the hotel," Everardo Acosta said. "I've asked, and I didn't get it. I can't confirm that he was there."

Calls to Columbia Police were not returned Tuesday afternoon.

On June 10, 13 days after Acosta's disappearance, Columbia police searched extensively for him with trained dogs after sending out two media releases asking for the public's help in finding him. Groups of Pulaski County residents conducted three independently funded search and rescue efforts, Begins said. The cost of the searches was in part covered by the Pulaski County Shriner Club, which Acosta was a member of, and through fundraising events organized by friends.

Everardo Acosta had already participated in missing person searches. He and his wife volunteer on weekends for United Response Search and Rescue Team in Texas. He never imagined looking for his own brother.

"I understand now the frustrations that people go through when looking for a loved one — especially when you can't get the help that you need," he said.
NJ man pleads guilty to national spamming scheme

KANSAS CITY, Mo.

A 57-year-old New Jersey man has pleaded guilty in federal court in Kansas City to his role in a nationwide e-mail spamming scheme.

The U.S. attorney's office says Paul Zucker admitted Tuesday to taking part in a scheme that targeted students at the University of Missouri and hundreds of other colleges and universities.

Zucker, of Wayne, N.J., and other conspirators used an e-mail extracting program to illegally harvest more than 8 million student e-mail addresses. Prosecutors say Zucker and others sent targeted spam e-mails hawking various products and services to those students.

Authorities said the massive amount of spam caused damage to the University of Missouri computer network and its users.

Zucker could be sentenced to up to five years in federal prison and a $250,000 fine.