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# Parents on trial for cancer treatment refusal

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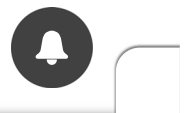
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Wiener Neustadt, Austria (AP) - The parents of a girl whose battle with cancer filled news pages across Europe last year went on trial yesterday charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm on their daughter.

They were also charged with removing a minor from the influence of a court-appointed guardian by fleeing with their daughter, Olivia Pilhar, to Spain to avoid chemotherapy and surgery on an abdominal tumour. Erika and Helmut Pilhar pleaded not guilty to the charges. Their lawyers argued that "they pursued the way deemed appropriate for responsible parents". If convicted on both counts, the parents could be sentenced to a maximum of three-and-a-half years in prison.



In June 1995, a court removed Olivia, then six years old, from her parents' guardianship. At that time, the tumour weighed four kilograms and almost filled her abdominal cavity. Doctors estimated her chances for survival had diminished from more than 90 per cent to a mere 10 per cent.

Against the will of her parents, doctors began chemotherapy to shrink the tumour. When they operated, the tumour was down to one-tenth of its former size. One kidney was disabled and was also removed.

Doctors said recently that Olivia's health had improved markedly and that she is likely to recover completely. But it would take about two years to establish with any certainty that she will survive.

The tumour was tiny when it was discovered in May 1995. But it grew rapidly as the parents refused chemotherapy on the advice of a former doctor who was opposed to conventional cancer treatments. The doctor, a German, had been stripped of his medical licence in 1986 because of his controversial views.

In court, Olivia's father detailed the family's ordeal from the time the cancer was diagnosed. He said that after many misgivings, he and his wife had decided to remove their daughter from conventional care and entrust her treatment to Geerd Ryke Hamer, the banned German doctor.

After a later court appearance by Olivia's mother, the trial is due to continue tomorrow, and a verdict is expected the same day.

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