

Parents let tumor grow in daughter

The Associated Press

WIENER NEUSTADT, Austria -- The parents of a girl whose cancer grew to nearly fill her abdominal cavity after they withheld medical treatment were convicted yesterday of inflicting grievous bodily harm.

Erika and Helmut Pilhar received eight-month suspended prison terms. They had fled from a court-appointed guardian to Spain with their daughter, Olivia, then 6, rather than allow her to undergo surgery and chemotherapy.

Both parents had pleaded not guilty and their lawyers argued they "pursued the way deemed appropriate for responsible parents."

Olivia's tumor was tiny when discovered on her kidney in May 1995. But it grew rapidly when her parents refused chemotherapy on the advice of a doctor opposed to conventional cancer treatment.

July 1995, when the court stepped in, the tumor weighed nine pounds and nearly filled the girl's abdominal cavity. Doctors estimated her chances for survival had diminished from more than 90 percent to 10 percent.

Against the will of her parents, doctors began chemotherapy to shrink the tumor. When they operated in September 1995, it was down to one-tenth of its former size, but one kidney was disabled and also removed by surgery.

Doctors said recently that Olivia's health had improved markedly but it would take two years to know if her recovery was complete.

The doctor who advised against treatment, a German, had been stripped of his medical license in 1986 because of his controversial views.

