

Mafia killed off the dying for £260 burial fee

Philip Willan Rome

Sicilian magistrates are investigating allegations that the mafia hastened the death of the terminally ill by injecting air into their veins to profit from funeral parlours that pay commission of €300 (£260) for every corpse.

Catania prosecutors are examining the claims first made last month by a satirical television programme, which interviewed two witnesses who claimed to have first-hand knowledge of the trade, said to have started in 2012.

Witnesses said that elderly patients in the town of Biancavilla who were being discharged from hospital to die at home were killed by ambulance workers in the back of the vehicles. The patients would be dead on arrival, when paramedics would recommend an undertaker and receive a finder's fee for every cadaver.

The business was controlled by the mafia, the witnesses claimed. The Cosa Nostra dictated the hiring decisions of the ambulance service and profits were diverted to them. The programme, *Le Iene* (The Hyenas), alleged that there had been dozens of suspicious deaths as a result of the racket.

One of the witnesses was accompanied by the programme makers to lodge a complaint with prosecutors in Catania. The man said he felt he had to come forward with his account after witnessing the murder of a friend's father.

"I don't deny [it] I'm afraid," he said. "If these people are capable of extinguishing the life of an elderly person in an ambulance, they can do the same thing to a young person who lodges an official complaint."

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