

## Lawyer: Son who killed mom, 98, adored her

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A Brentwood man intent on killing himself due to his failing health suffocated his 98-year-old mother because he didn't want to leave her alone, the man's attorney said yesterday.

Juan R. Gonzalez, 69, pleaded not guilty to second-degree murder yesterday afternoon at a bedside arraignment in Southside Hospital in Bay Shore.

He is charged with putting a plastic bag over the head of his mother, Teresa Astete, on May 29 in the studio apartment they shared.

"He was her primary caregiver," said his attorney, Michael Brown of Central Islip. "She was bedridden. She couldn't see, couldn't walk, couldn't hear. He fed her, bathed her, brushed her teeth. He did everything for her."

But Gonzalez, a widower and a retired maintenance worker for Columbia University, was developing his own health problems, Brown said. He had diabetes and high blood pressure. He had to use a walker to get around and was hospitalized briefly at Syosset Hospital earlier this year, Brown said.

A few weeks ago, Brown said Gonzalez got a certified letter from his doctor, informing him that he also had skin cancer and should come in for treatment. To his client, Brown said the news was devastating. He thought his own death was imminent, and he was distraught about what would happen to his mother, Brown said.

"Everything was on his shoulders," Brown said. "Obviously, things went awry."

According to the felony complaint in the case, Gonzalez told police after his arrest "that he wanted to kill himself but did not want to leave his mother alone, so he put a plastic bag over her head and killed her. Then he tried to kill himself."

Brown said he took large doses of his medications -- insulin and Tylenol -- and slashed his wrists. He lost consciousness for five days. When he came to on June 3, he called his daughter, who then called 911.

"It's horrible," Brown said. "This guy loved, adored his mother."

The Suffolk district attorney's office declined to comment on the case.

Judge Madeleine Fitzgibbon ordered Gonzalez held without bail.