

# Lawsuit: Doctors operated on wrong side of woman's brain

BY ANNE SULLIVAN

THE NEWS-HERALD

DETROIT — Deborah Blankenship died 16 months after doctors at Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center in Dearborn operated on the wrong side of her brain.

A lawsuit was filed earlier this month in Wayne County Circuit Court on behalf of Blankenship's family.

The 49-year-old Flat Rock woman came to Oakwood Hospital with a severe headache Aug. 6, 2007.

At that time, Blankenship was neurologically sound, the lawsuit says.

Oakwood doctors found a 2 mm to 3 mm aneurysm in her brain, and she was diagnosed with a bleeding aneurysm.

Initial treatment of coiling the aneurysm caused it to rupture, requiring Blankenship to undergo

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on the wrong side of her brain, it says.

Blankenship suffered permanent brain damage, impaired cognitive capacity and was incapable of making life decisions and living independently from Aug. 6, 2007, until her death Dec. 8, 2008, the lawsuit says.

Attorney Brian McKeen filed the lawsuit for the family, seeking more than \$25,000 in damages.

The lawsuit names Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center; Dr. Hasnain Haider-Shah, a radiologist; Dr. Robert R. Johnson, a neurosurgeon; and University Neurosurgical Associates.

At the time, Haider-Shah and Johnson were employees of the Oakwood Healthcare System.

See LAWSUIT — Page 16-A

## LAWSUIT

Continued from Page 1-A

Johnson also was an employee of University Neurosurgical Services.

The doctors no longer work for Oakwood and a hospital spokeswoman said in an e-mail that she did not know how to contact them.

They were not reached for comment on this report.

Haider-Shah initially attempted coiling the aneurysm, a decision the lawsuit says was negligent.

Before the aneurysm was secured, Blankenship was given heparin, a drug that prevents blood from clotting, and that resulted in more bleeding from the aneurysm and the need for additional surgery, the lawsuit says.

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This is an occurrence that the medical profession calls a "never event," meaning it should never happen, McKeen said.

In preparation for surgery, Blankenship's hair was shaved, her skull was cut open and the layer covering her brain was peeled back on the right side of her brain, McKeen said, but the aneurysm was on the left side of her brain.

When Johnson began operating, he called for Haider-Shah and asked which side of the brain the aneurysm was on and was told the left.

The right side of the brain had to be closed and the left side prepared for surgery.

"She lost precious time," McKeen said. "By the time they did the repair, she suffered major neurological injury. She lived 16 months, brain damaged, unable to communicate with family. She lived a horrible quality of life, then she died."

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happen, McKeen said.

"It's such an egregious example of malpractice, it is preventable, and it involves severe cases of damage," he said.

The violations of safety rules that occurred in this case resulted in catastrophic damage and that is something that should not be tolerated, McKeen said.

"The medical profession has said this should never happen, yet it continues to happen because they're not following precautions for communication, safety," McKeen said.

If safety protocols are followed, this kind of thing would never happen, he said.

Wrong-site surgeries are "an extremely serious matter," Paula Rivera-Kerr, media relations manager at Oakwood Healthcare Inc., says in a press release.

The hospital took steps to implement corrections, the press release says.

Among those steps, it says, were immediately reporting the incident to the Joint Commission, an independent, not-for-profit organization that accredits and certifies health care organizations and programs in the United States.

"Oakwood has taken aggressive action to implement more robust patient safety protocols through an initiative known as Life Wings," the release says.

Now, 100 percent of actively practicing physicians in the operating rooms and procedural areas at Oakwood have been trained, it says.

"Our primary concern has always been for the patient and her family," the press release says.

Rivera-Kerr said Blankenship's family was notified immediately.

"We deeply regret the heartache they have experienced, and in an effort to respect the patient's family and adhere to patient privacy laws, we will not release information specific to this case," the press release says.

"Oakwood is committed to patient safety and through crew resource management and other efforts, we believe every patient will receive the best possible care at all Oakwood facilities."