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Jury awards \$1.8 million in Gratiot malpractice case

A Gratiot County jury awarded \$1.8 million to the family of a Mt. Pleasant woman in a medical negligence suit against Dr. Gregory Strauther and Gratiot Medical Center in Alma.

In March 2002, Lucy Ames, 42, was admitted to the hospital for abdominal pain. Two days later she had her gall bladder removed in a laparoscopic surgery.

On July 30 of that year, she died at University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. She was suffering from sepsis and a perforated pouch at the beginning of the large intestine.

The jury agreed with the plaintiff's attorney, Brian McKeen of McKeen and Associates of Detroit, that Strauther was negligent in clipping the right hepatic duct which led to her death.

According to McKeen, Strauther is now practicing medicine in North Carolina and several websites indicate that a Dr. Gregory Strauther is working in Fayetteville.

Penny Daniels, GMC spokeswoman said only that, "He is not on the active duty medical staff at Gratiot Medical Center."

Besides Strauther and GMC, several other entities were also sued including the University of Michigan Hospital, Sparrow Hospital and the Gastroenterology Institute of Michigan. Several other doctors were named in the suit as well.

McKeen, however, said a judge in Ann Arbor dismissed the other groups and doctors and the case was given to Gratiot County Circuit Court Judge Randy Tahvonen.

Now that the case is over, McKeen said he will appeal to allow Sparrow Hospital and the Gastroenterology Institute to be sued.

The focus of the case was however, against Strauther and no appeal is allowed for him, due to an agreement reached between the parties that precluded an appeal, he said.

McKeen said he expects Tavonen to reduce the \$1.8 million to about \$1.4 million in cash.

Tahvonen said most medical malpractice suits are settled out of court. The case files regarding Ames are at least two feet tall, the result of years of detailed work by the lawyers.

Strauther's attorney, James Brazeau of Toledo, couldn't be reached for comment.

For his part, McKeen said that the case shows that "surgeons should never clip a vital body part without conclusively identifying what it is. There are safety rules and there needs to be accountability."