

St. Louis County jury awards \$10.8 million medical negligence verdict

Jim Doyle

Aug 30, 2013

A St. Louis County jury has awarded more than \$10.8 million to the husband and children of a 34-year-old woman from Maplewood who died in 2011 shortly after a cardiac catheterization on the campus of Mercy Hospital St. Louis.

The verdict, issued Thursday against Dr. Robert P. Ferrara and Mercy Clinic Heart and Vascular LLC, appears to be one of the largest ever medical negligence awards in the St. Louis area.

“Our sympathy continues to go out to the Dodson family,” Chesterfield-based Mercy Health said in a written statement.

However, Mercy said it also would pursue “post-trial relief, including post-trial motions and appeal.”

Twelve jurors who sat through an eight-day trial before St. Louis County Circuit Judge Thea Sherry in Clayton voted 11-1 in favor of awarding compensatory damages totaling \$10,831,155. No punitive damages were awarded.

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The case revolved around the death in February 2011 of Shannon Dodson soon after she had a “routine catheterization” procedure at the Mercy Heart and Vascular Hospital, according to the plaintiffs’ attorneys.

They said Mercy and Ferrara did not take timely or appropriate actions to treat her complications from the medical procedure.

Shannon Dodson and her husband, Jason Dodson, an attorney at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, resided in Maplewood. Their three children are ages 5, 9 and 11.

“She had a very, very mild history of heart issues,” said Maurice Graham of the St. Louis law firm of Gary, Ritter & Graham. Also handling the plaintiffs’ case was John G. Simon of the Simon Law Firm in St. Louis.

Graham said Shannon Dodson actually went to the doctor for bronchitis, but initial tests showed a possible sign of heart trouble.

“Her heart was healthy and clear, but during the procedure one of the coronary arteries was dissected,” Graham said. What that means, he told the jury, is the inner lining of an important coronary artery was disrupted by the tip of the catheter.

As a result, the inner lining collapsed and cut off a significant supply of blood to the heart.

According to the plaintiffs’ attorneys, more than a half hour passed before the patient was taken for surgery. When she arrived almost 50 minutes later, they said, she was near death.

Mercy and Ferrara, an interventional cardiologist, testified that all reasonable and proper steps had been taken to care for Shannon Dodson.

“They said it was a rare complication that was difficult to deal with, that they acted appropriately and regretted it did not turn out well,” Graham said.

Ferrara and his attorney, Paul Venker, were unavailable for comment.

“I think this was an unfortunate, isolated situation,” Graham said. “We were pleased that this victory was rendered for the Dodson family, but there was no celebration.”