

Maryland Heights couple win \$6.4 million medical malpractice verdict

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C LAYTON • A jury awarded a Maryland Heights man and his wife \$6.4 million in a medical malpractice lawsuit as a result of a stroke he suffered in 2007.

Jeffrey Schneider, 59, and his wife, Connie Schneider, alleged an infection that caused an acute stroke could have been diagnosed and treated were it not for the medical negligence of Jeffrey Schneider's physician, Dr. Joseph Thompson of SSM DePaul Medical Group. On Friday a St. Louis County jury agreed.

Thompson diagnosed Schneider with mitral valve prolapse in 1996, the lawsuit said, a condition in which a valve of the heart does not close tightly, which can cause blood to flow backward in the heart. An echocardiogram in 2001 again showed the existence of the condition.

The Schneiders said Thompson did not order any follow-up echocardiograms after 2001, and that the diagnosis of the condition "disappeared completely from Dr. Thompson's diagnoses or 'problems' list for Jeff" after March 2002. Schneider was never referred to a cardiologist, according to the suit.

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Schneider became very ill in April 2007, and complained to Thompson of fatigue, loss of appetite and abdominal pain. He eventually said he felt like he was dying, according to the lawsuit. Thompson referred Schneider to other doctors for tests but didn't refer him to a cardiologist or order any tests examining his heart.

In May 2007, Connie Schneider called Thompson and asked that her husband be admitted to a hospital because of his deteriorating condition, and Thompson said she should wait for test results from a hematologist, the lawsuit alleged.

On June 12, 2007, Schneider suffered an acute stroke resulting from a bacterial infection on his heart valve. He has restricted use of the right side of his body, difficulty processing words and damage to his short-term memory. The Schneiders' attorney, Pat Hagerty, said Schneider hasn't been able to work since the stroke occurred. Previously, he was a bank examiner and an IT specialist at the Federal Reserve Bank.

The attorneys for Thompson and the medical practice argued that the evidence “failed to prove” they were negligent or that their alleged negligence caused Schneider’s injuries.

Missouri Lawyers Weekly reported that the \$6.4 million verdict was one of the largest medical malpractice awards in the state, according to its verdicts and appeals database.

Thompson and SSM DePaul can seek a new trial or can appeal.

Thompson’s attorney, Maureen Bryan, said she wasn’t available to answer questions Tuesday afternoon.