

## End-Stage COPD: Was Morphine Overdose The Cause Of Death?

During a previous admission for her COPD, after being weaned from the respirator, the seventy-nine year-old patient reportedly told her physician she did not want to be intubated again if she went into respiratory arrest.

The patient was admitted again for end-stage COPD with orders for 2 mg of morphine q 30-60 minutes prn for pain.

After she coded and was revived without being intubated the physician verified with her daughter that the patient should not be resuscitated if she coded again. Then the physician ordered and the nurse gave 20 mg of morphine, and the patient soon passed away.

The Court of Appeals of Georgia ruled the nurse and physician were not entitled to a summary judgment of dismissal, that is, the family will have their day in court.

The question will be whether the 20 mg of morphine was the cause of death, in which case the family will have grounds for a wrongful-death lawsuit, or whether the morphine merely eased the patient's suffering as she passed from her underlying COPD, in which case there will be grounds for a defense verdict. Pruette v. Phoebe Putney Mem. Hosp., \_\_\_ S.E. 2d \_\_\_, 2008 WL 5248973 (Ga. App., December 18, 2008).

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***The family of the deceased has alleged the nurse violated the nursing standard of care by administering an overdose of morphine.***

***The nurse and the physician claim that the elderly patient's COPD was the actual cause of death and that the morphine merely eased her suffering in her final hours.***

COURT OF APPEALS OF GEORGIA  
December 18, 2008

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