

## Bedsore: Not Appropriate To Reposition Patient During Heart Catheterization, Court Says.

A diabetic paraplegic went to the heart institute for cardiac catheterization and three days later had bypass surgery.

Later he developed bedsore and decubitus ulcers on both heels and on his buttocks. He had to have both feet amputated below the knees and large sections of his buttocks were surgically removed.

The patient sued the heart institute and his physicians for negligence. He alleged the physicians and nurses should have known of his heightened susceptibility to skin breakdown and repositioned him during the four-hour procedure.

The jury heard testimony from both cardiologists that, notwithstanding his diabetes and susceptibility to skin breakdown, it would not have been right to move him once the procedure was underway.

The cardiologists, in fact, had both reached settlements with the patient prior to trial, leaving the heart institute as the only defendant before the jury.

That is, the only issue for the jury to rule upon was the alleged negligence of the institute's perioperative staff.

The jury found for the heart institute and the Court of Appeal of Washington affirmed the jury's verdict in an unpublished opinion.

### Too Dangerous to Move the Patient

The court agreed with the physicians' judgment it would have been very dangerous to the patient to try to move the patient while cardiac catheterization was underway, while metal probes were in a major blood vessel leading to the heart, even though a patient like this generally cannot go four hours without repositioning.

### Positioning, Padding Were Adequate

The court was also unable to find anything wrong with how the patient was positioned and padded from the start.

He was placed flat on his back lying on a one-inch foam pad with both arms supported by arm rests attached to the sides of the narrow catheterization table. **Todd v. Hearsh Institute of Spokane**, 2003 WL 1824981 (Wash. App., April 8, 2003).

***A diabetic paraplegic patient is extremely susceptible to skin breakdown and decubitus ulcers.***

***The nurses who attended to the patient during his heart catheterization had multiple opportunities to reposition him during the procedure to minimize the risk of skin breakdown.***

***He developed decubitus ulcers on both heels and on his buttocks and had to have both feet amputated and large sections of his buttocks resected.***

***However, in the cardiologists' judgment it was not appropriate to move him at all once the cardiac catheterization was underway.***

***The catheterization took more than four hours, longer than expected. The first cardiologist tried to go in through the right femoral artery, then had the nurses scrub and prep the left femoral artery. When that was not successful he called for his associate to scrub in and try the left brachial artery, which was successful.***

***During the whole time the patient had to be kept completely still.***

COURT OF APPEALS OF WASHINGTON  
UNPUBLISHED OPINION  
April 8, 2003

## Cardiac Care: Nurse Fails To Answer Pager, Court Affirms Dismissal.

A registered nurse was discharged from her employment as a staff nurse on a hospital's cardiac care unit after she failed to respond promptly to a pager alert set off by a patient.

***Failure to comply with an employer's policies and procedures may be considered conduct justifying termination for cause, especially in cases where the employee is a health care professional whose lapses could jeopardize the safety of a patient.***

NEW YORK SUPREME COURT  
APPELLATE DIVISION  
April 10, 2003

The New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, ruled the employer had grounds to terminate the nurse for cause.

According to the court, the pager alert that was ignored by the nurse was triggered by a heart arrhythmia detected by the patient's cardiac monitor.

Arrhythmia is potentially a serious condition. If a competent evaluation and an appropriate response are not promptly given, the patient could die, the court pointed out.

The court also pointed out that the nurse had already received several warnings and a three-day suspension for unsatisfactory job performance, although the nature and seriousness of these incidents were not specified in the court record.

The court accepted the supervisor's testimony there was nothing wrong with the pager. **Claim of Shene**, \_\_ N.Y.S.2d \_\_, 2003 N.Y. Slip Op. 12938, 2003 WL 1849718 (N.Y. App., April 10, 2003).