

Compartment Syndrome: Nurses Ruled Not Liable.

The patient came in for what was supposed to be a routine same-day orthopedic procedure, a radial osteotomy with lengthening of the radius and tricortical iliac bone grafting on the left forearm.

The orthopedic surgeon casted the arm and transferred the patient to the recovery room. However, because the patient's pain was not subsiding with the usual post-operative analgesics the patient was admitted to the hospital overnight.

In the hospital an anesthesiologist started the patient on a patient-controlled analgesic morphine pump. Even that did not seem to control the pain, so another anesthesiologist gave a 10 mg bolus and reset the dosage available for patient self-administration to a higher level.

The hospital's nurses were not responsible for assessing the patient's cast or for determining why the patient was experiencing such a high level of pain post-operatively.

CIRCUIT COURT, DEKALB COUNTY
GEORGIA
May 30, 2008

The patient was discharged the next morning but had to return to the hospital's emergency room later the same day. The emergency physician conferred with the orthopedist about replacing the plaster cast with a split cast, but, on the orthopedist's recommendation, that was not done.

Months later the patient was diagnosed with compartment syndrome.

The jury in the Circuit Court, DeKalb County, Georgia found the orthopedist 100% at fault.

The orthopedist was kept fully aware of the post-operative course. It was not the hospital's nurses' responsibility, in the jury's judgment, to evaluate the cast and make recommendations to the doctor. ***Murray v. Jove, 2008 WL 6690072 (Cir. Ct. DeKalb Co., Georgia, May 30, 2008).***