

Code: Crash Cart Not Stocked, Other Equipment Non-Functional, Patient Dies, Family Sues.

A wrongful-death lawsuit filed in the Superior Court, Essex County, New Jersey, recently resulted in a \$1,300,000 settlement for the family of a sixty-eight year-old patient who died in the hospital four hours after thyroid cancer surgery, one hour after being transferred from intensive care to a med/surg unit.

Defendants named in the lawsuit, besides the hospital, included three staff nurses from the med/surg unit, the hospital's director of nursing, the pharmacy director and the head of central supply.

Equipment, Supplies Missing

Equipment Failed

The patient went into respiratory arrest with a blood clot blocking her upper airway. A code was called.

The first thing that went wrong was that the batteries in the laryngoscope on the crash cart were dead and no spare batteries for it had been stocked on the cart.

Next the wall-mounted suction in the patient's room would not work.

The lawsuit also alleged the med/surg nurses hesitated for thirty to forty-five minutes from the time they first saw signs of respiratory difficulty until a code had to be called because the patient had gone into full-blown respiratory arrest.

The Defendants

Pointed Their Fingers

At Each Other

The hospital was reportedly prepared to defend itself by pointing out it had a policy for extra batteries to be packed with laryngoscopes.

The med/surg staff nurses reportedly were going to argue it was not a nursing responsibility to stock or inspect the crash cart, shifting the blame to the hospital's central supply department.

Nevertheless all the parties joined as defendants joined in paying a substantial settlement. **Fregosi v. Clara Maas Medical Ctr.**, 2008 WL 2189884 (Sup. Ct. Essex Co., New Jersey, May 12, 2008).