

LEGAL EAGLE EYE NEWSLETTER

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Dehydration: Nursing Interventions Could Have Saved Patient, Lawsuit To Go Forward.

After hospitalization for a stroke the patient was transferred to a nursing home for rehabilitation.

Soon the patient began suffering from chronic diarrhea which resulted in her death from dehydration less than three months later. The daughter, as personal representative of her late mother's estate, sued the nursing home and the treating physician for negligence resulting in her mother's wrongful death. The Court of Appeals of Ohio ruled there were grounds for the lawsuit to go forward.

The experts hired by the family's lawyers to testify against the nursing home stated that the patient's death was caused by dehydration due to prolonged diarrhea caused by the patient's continued use of the diabetes medication metformin and a diuretic prescribed for her high blood pressure, as well as substandard care.

Substandard Nursing Care

The nurses failed to record the patient's daily bowel movements. That would have provided a basis for informing her doctor that her diarrhea had been going on for months.

The nurses failed to monitor, document and report that her weight was steadily declining even though she was eating well. She was not being weighed on a daily or even weekly basis.



The patient's death could have been prevented by various interventions as late as a few days before her death.

These interventions include discontinuing her diabetes medication metformin which is known to cause diarrhea, treating her diarrhea and rehydrating her with intravenous fluids or increasing the fluids she was taking by mouth.

COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO
June 30, 2010

The patient's blood pressure was not being monitored even though she was on medication for high blood pressure. Her blood pressure once dropped so low that she actually collapsed.

More than one month before her death there was a nursing note the patient had poor skin turgor, an obvious sign of dehydration, but there was no documentation of further assessment or follow up.

According to the family's experts, a medical doctor and an RN who was also a licensed nursing home administrator, it is standard practice in a nursing home to carefully monitor and document possible signs and symptoms of dehydration as well as to monitor and record the patient's daily fluid intake, but that was not done.

The patient's death would have been prevented, the family's medical expert went on to say, if the nurses had reported the diarrhea and dehydration to the doctor and discussed discontinuing the metformin. The nurses should also have increased the fluids the patient was getting by obtaining an order for an IV and/or increasing the fluids she was getting orally. The basic cause of death was substandard nursing and medical care, the Court concluded. ***Sliwinski v. Village at St. Edward, 2010 WL 2622936 (Ohio App., June 30, 2010).***

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