

## Dialysis: Nurse Cancelled Order For Lab Work.

A few minutes into her dialysis treatment in her nephrologist's office the patient began bleeding at her catheter site.

The nephrologist had to send her to the emergency room at a local hospital. The emergency room physician phoned the nephrologist. An order was entered on the hospital's computer for lab work which would have included a potassium level.

About an hour later the emergency room physician, having stitched up the catheter site, discharged the patient from the hospital.

### **Nurse Cancelled Patient's Lab Work**

About two hours after the patient was discharged a hospital nurse cancelled the lab work, apparently because the patient had already been sent home.

The next morning the patient's mother phoned the nephrologist about the fact her daughter's dialysis was not completed the previous afternoon. The nephrologist told the mother not to worry. The emergency room doctor would have phoned him about the lab work if there was anything wrong like an excessively high potassium level.

Later that night the patient, back in the emergency room, died from hyperkalemia.

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***Nurses in this hospital's E.R. were allowed to obtain routine lab work without a physician's order.***

***However, no lab work ordered by a physician was to be cancelled except upon a physician's order.***

COURT OF APPEALS OF TENNESSEE  
May 21, 2009

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The Court of Appeals of Tennessee endorsed a substantial jury verdict against the two physicians, the hospital and the nurse who cancelled the lab work.

Even though the patient had been discharged her lab work still should have been done and read by someone knowledgeable and, if necessary, the patient contacted to come back to the hospital. **Howell v. Turner**, 2009 WL 1422982 (Tenn. App., May 21, 2009).