

Hypoglycemia: Patient Left To Die In The Emergency Department.

The emergency department triage nurse and the physician both concluded the patient was having an episode of diabetic hypoglycemia. Both could detect an odor of alcohol on her breath.

She had been drinking that day and had taken her insulin but had not had anything to eat before being found unconscious in her apartment. Paramedics had given glucagon on the way to the hospital.

Lab tests confirmed a blood alcohol concentration of .24. After getting some dextrose the patient became cogent and responsive. She confirmed she had trouble managing her diabetes when she drank.

The physician told her never to drink again and discharged her. The nurse phoned a family member who said she could not leave work to come for her.

Eight hours later she was found dead

One of the hospital's medical experts testified that alcohol withdrawal seizures are not uncommonly seen in the E.R.

That does not prove this patient died of a seizure rather than a hypoglycemic episode.

SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA
November 2, 2007

in the emergency department waiting area. Her post-mortem blood glucose was 17.

The Supreme Court of Virginia threw out the jury's verdict for the hospital as erroneously influenced by medical testimony, unfounded in the court's opinion, that it was an alcohol withdrawal seizure that killed her. **Dagner v. Anderson, 651 S.E. 2d 640 (November 2, 2007).**