

# Insulin Drip: IV Discontinued, Injections Not Started, Patient Arrests.

The fifty-three year-old female patient was in the hospital recovering from open heart surgery.

The patient was an insulin-dependent diabetic. Her physicians placed her on an IV insulin drip for five days after surgery. On the fifth day it was time to begin weaning her from the drip and get her back on her regular insulin injections.

## **Hospital Policy**

### **Weaning Patients From Insulin Drip**

According to the court record, the hospital had a standing policy for gradually weaning patients from insulin drips. Recognizing that the process can cause complications, frequent blood glucose monitoring throughout the process was expected to be done.

In this case the nurses abruptly discontinued the patient's IV drip instead of following the hospital's standing policy for gradually weaning the patient. The patient's blood sugar was not tested for more than seven hours after the drip was stopped.

After the patient was served and ate her dinner her insulin level naturally dropped. Having been a diabetic for many years, the patient herself knew her insulin was low and alerted her nurse at about 7:00 p.m. The nurse told the patient to go back to bed; she was not scheduled to have her blood sugar tested until 9:00 p.m.

That never happened. The patient went into cardiac arrest at 9:30 p.m.

It took the code team thirty-six minutes to realize she had arrested because her potassium was high and she needed insulin. She was deprived of oxygen for forty minutes and is now profoundly disabled.

The jury in the Circuit Court, Duval County, Florida awarded the patient \$8,800,000. **Gallagher v. Southern Baptist Hosp., 2008 WL 1808395 (Cir. Ct. Duval Co., Florida, March 22, 2008).**