

Post-Surgical Nursing: Court Says Nurses Must Monitor Blood Flow To Extremity After Orthopedic Procedure.

Nurses caring for an orthopedic post-op patient must closely monitor blood flow in the affected extremity. If a problem is allowed to develop without the physician being promptly notified, the nurses caring for the patient can be found negligent, according to a recent ruling from the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.

After an orthopedic procedure involving the thigh and knee, nurses caring for the patient must check the lower leg for adequate pulses and for signs of ischemia in the foot.

A nurse's failure to monitor the patient and detect problems with circulation or failure to notify the physician in time mean civil liability for professional negligence.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS,
SIXTH CIRCUIT (TENNESSEE), 1997.

However, in this case the hospital which employed the nurses was not sued by the patient. The orthopedic surgeon and the vascular surgeon wanted the court to apportion part of the verdict against them against the hospital's nurses.

The court stated in general terms that nurses have the legal duty to monitor an orthopedic post-op patient very closely for adequate blood flow in the affected extremity, but in this particular case the court saw no evidence to suggest that any part of the blame should fall on the nurses. ***Free vs. Carnesale***, 110 F. 3d 1227 (6th Cir., 1997).

Visitor's Slip And Fall: Court Rules Hospital Is Not Liable, Based On Nurse's Testimony.

A nurse responded at once when a family member came to the nurses' station and reported a visitor had just fallen on a puddle of juice near the elevator.

The nurse took the report at face value and went to assist the visitor, bringing a towel to wipe up the juice so no one else would fall.

A visitor had indeed fallen. The nurse inspected the area carefully and did not find any liquid on the floor. The hospital was ruled not liable, as there was no proof of a foreign substance on the floor to implicate the hospital for negligence.

COURT OF APPEAL OF LOUISIANA, 1997.

A hospital or other healthcare facility can be held liable in a civil negligence lawsuit if a visitor is injured in a slip-and-fall due to a foreign substance spilled on the floor.

In a recent case handed down by the Court of Appeal of Louisiana, a hospital was ruled not liable, based on the testimony of the nurse who was the first to respond to a report that a visitor had fallen on a puddle of juice spilled on the floor just outside the elevator. It was just after the dinner cart had been brought to the floor via the elevator. The nurse knew she had to go to the visitor's assistance at once, and assumed the report was correct about juice on the floor. She grabbed a towel to wipe it up so no one else would fall.

In carefully inspecting the area, however, the nurse found no liquid spilled on the floor. It was implicit from the court record that a notation of the nurse's observations was in the hospital's internal incident report to assist her with her testimony later in court. ***Holden vs. Louisiana State University Medical Center***, 690 So. 2d 958 (La. App., 1997).

Nursing Assessment: Court Impressed With Nurse's Care Of A Psychiatric Patient.

A patient with a history of psychiatric problems and drug abuse was admitted to psychiatric intensive care, believed by his physician to be suffering from acute psychosis.

According to the Supreme Court of Nebraska, the patient's nurse was still correct in doing a complete nursing physical assessment. Follow-up medical evaluation of the high fever the nurse detected showed the patient in fact had severe acute viral encephalitis. ***Vilcinkas vs. Johnson***, 562 N.W. 2d 57 (Neb., 1997).

The patient was placed in psychiatric intensive care for acute psychosis. The nurse nevertheless did a complete physical assessment. A temp of 103° made the nurse suspect an infectious process, which she reported to the physician.

SUPREME COURT OF NEBRASKA, 1997.