

Lithium Toxicity: Court Faults Nurse Practitioner.

The patient's psychiatric nurse practitioner at the community mental health clinic heard reports from persons at the patient's assisted living placement that suggested she was having lithium toxicity.

The nurse practitioner sent the patient to the lab for a blood draw with an express order for a lithium level.

However, the nurse practitioner never followed up by getting and reviewing the lab results or by ordering additional testing, according to the judge in the US District Court for the District of Alaska.

Moreover, according to the judge, by the time she was sent for this blood draw it had been over eight months since her last lithium level check, too long for a patient on lithium to go without a routine lithium level, with or without signs or symptoms of possible toxicity.

The patient went into cardiac arrest and is now on a ventilator, which the Court ruled was the direct result of negligence by the psychiatric nurse practitioner, the staff at the assisted living home and the lab where the patient was sent for her lithium blood draw.

\$1,000,000 in damages were awarded plus future medical expenses. **Liebsack v US, 2010 WL 3522342 (D. Alaska, September 2, 2010).**