

Operating Room Surgery Embolism Nitrogen

A forty-five year-old woman died on the operating table from a nitrogen gas embolism during a diagnostic hysteroscopy. When she went into arrest all the gas and fluid lines were abruptly disconnected as an attempt was made to save her.

This could only have happened because the hysteroscope was hooked up erroneously, that is, there is no question someone in the room was negligent.

The patient was completely helpless. She was under anesthesia.

All the defendants who scrubbed in can point their fingers if they want, but they are all responsible as far as the patient's family is concerned.

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY, 1999.

The Supreme Court of New Jersey ruled the explanation had to be someone connected the N₂ supply to the fluid drain, and that was unquestionably negligent. All the sterile surgical personnel were assigned portions of the \$2,000,000 verdict.

However, the circulating nurse only opened the packaging on the scope, instruments, supply and drain lines, etc., and connected the N₂ line dropped off the field to the N₂ supply in the operating room.

She had no direct involvement in connecting the tubes and lines on the operative field. She alone was not to blame for this tragic incident, the court ruled. **Chin v. St. Barnabas Medical Center**, 734 A. 2d 778 (N.J., 1999).