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Doctors say they gave patient proper care

JURY from A-1

help, and they didn't help him," Carrie Anderson, his common-law wife, said Wednesday. She is the mother of the two youngest children.

"He looked at me and said, 'Oh my God, Carrie, it's bursting. Then his head fell back, and I knew it in my heart ...'"

Gabriel Anderson underwent surgery but was brain-dead. Doctors disconnected him from life-support machines five days later. Faiella argued that doctors could have saved him if they had operated before the aneurysm burst.

An aneurysm is a ballooning of the wall of an artery or vein. They can be deadly if they rupture.

Carrie Anderson said her children, who used to sleep with the couple in bed, were traumatized by their father's death.

"Now they understand Daddy is in heaven, and they can talk to him any time," she said. "They know he's looking down at them."

Emergency-room doctors and their lawyer contend that jurors got so swept up in the emotional tale that they ignored facts that supported the doctors.

They plan to ask Circuit Judge Lawrence Kirkwood to grant a new trial and to reduce the damage award.

Jurors deliberated six hours before returning their verdict Tuesday night against Florida Emergency Physicians, Kang & Associates, M.D., P.A. The 40-doctor group provides emergency-room physicians for Florida Hospital.

Jurors determined the group was 75 percent negligent and that Gabriel Anderson's neurosurgeon, Dr. Phillip St. Louis, was 25 percent negligent.

That actually reduces the verdict to \$6.75 million because the neurologist was not included in the trial and won't have to pay. Faiella settled with him earlier in the case.

Attorney Gary Rushmer, who represents St. Louis, said two renowned neurosurgeons reviewed his client's actions and determined he wasn't negligent.

Richard Ramsey, attorney for the emergency-room doctors, said they provided excellent care and that nobody should be blamed for Anderson's death.

"These are deadly conditions, and the patients can die despite the best of care," he said.

Stories differ widely on what actually happened in the case. Both sides disagree on whether Gabriel Anderson suffered severe headaches for months before seeking help.

Nevertheless, he arrived at the Health Central emergency room in west Orange County on Oct. 13, 1998. Doctors originally thought he had a brain tumor, but his neurosurgeon discovered some time later that it was an aneurysm.

He scheduled his patient for a test and probable surgery in two days. But Gabriel Anderson wouldn't live that long. The day after leaving his doctor's office, pain sent him to the emergency room at Florida Hospital.

Anderson's wife said that doctors did little for her husband and sent him home.

But Dr. Angela Garcia said he left the hospital even though she tried to make him stay and warned that he could die if he did. She said she called his neurosurgeon to tell him of the events and marked the episode in her notes.

The next day, when Anderson was scheduled for his test and surgery, he returned to the hospital at 3:30 a.m. — 3½ hours early. He was in pain again.

Dr. Kahang Chan, the hospital's 1999 Emergency Room Physician of the Year, maintained that he kept his patient stable. But Faiella said her client was in agony, which increased his blood pressure and made him more susceptible to an aneurysm rupture.

At 7 a.m., Anderson was scheduled for his test. Surgery was expected to follow. Chan's shift ended, and he left the hospital thinking Anderson was stable and his test was imminent, Ramsey said.

But no one came to conduct the test. Also, no one called Anderson's neurologist to say his patient had arrived early at the hospital in distress. At 8 a.m., Anderson spoke his final words, Faiella said.

"It was so preventable," the attorney said.

If the appeals fail, the money for the children will be held by the court system. The two mothers will be able to petition for payments that benefit the youngsters, such as for private school or medical care.

Anderson's oldest child, 7-year-old Samantha Ireland, lives in Georgia with her mother. The two youngest children, Devin Anderson, 5, and Alanna Anderson, 3, live in the Marion County town of Weirsdale with Carrie Anderson, who plans to return to work after both are in school.

"I think they [doctors] wish they had paid more attention," the mother said. "I just hope maybe they'll think and little more and be a little more cautious."

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