

JURY SIDES WITH PARENTS IN MALPRACTICE SUIT

By PRECIOUS PETTY
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A federal jury Monday ruled doctors from St. Luke's Hospital and affiliated medical practices should pay more than \$1.5 million in damages if they are found liable for the 2002 death of a baby boy.

The liability phase of the medical malpractice lawsuit filed on behalf of the child and his parents, former Allentown residents H. Gregory and Elizabeth Gulick, is planned for later this year. The couple has since moved to Red Bank, N.J.

Doctors involved in Connor G. Gulick's birth and subsequent treatment at St. Luke's in Fountain Hill were negligent in his care, according to the lawsuit. Gulick was born Oct. 18 and died three days later.

The lawsuit alleges Gulick developed lung disease because doctors performed a Cesarean section delivery too early.

Doctors then administered anesthesia to the infant in preparation for surgery to repair an unrelated abdominal defect. The anesthesia exacerbated the child's breathing difficulties, and ultimately led to his death, according to the lawsuit.

The plaintiffs claim recommended tests to check the baby's lung maturity before the C-section were not performed, and that surgery -- and thus the anesthesia -- could have been deferred safely until his lung condition improved.

"They caused a newborn to go from being an essentially healthy child to a child who was lung injured, which resulted in a severe brain injury," the Gulick's attorney, Thomas R. Kline, said Wednesday.

The jury determined that Connor Gulick's pain and suffering are worth \$500,000, and his future lost earning capacity is \$1,047,500, he said.

"This was the first phase of a two-phase trial to hold accountable St. Luke's Hospital and physicians who were responsible for the death of Connor Gulick, a 3-day-old, healthy child," Kline said.

During the liability phase of the trial, a jury will decide which, and to what extent named defendants are culpable for the baby's death, he said.

Two doctors involved in the case, Max Ramenofsky, and William R. Cherry, settled with the Gulicks for \$500,000 each before the damages phase of the trial began, Kline said.

St. Luke's spokeswoman Susan Schantz emphasized that the jury's decision Monday did not ascribe blame to any of the hospital's doctors or affiliates.

"This settlement has nothing to do with medical liability," she said. "St. Luke's always provides exceptional care, and in this case met all the accepted standards of care. Unfortunately, there are times when biology causes events, such as death and disability."

Elizabeth Gulick was employed by St. Luke's at the time of her son's death.