

Jury OKs \$5.5 million for kin of slain Hahnemann parking-lot attendant

By JULIE SHAW
Philadelphia Daily News
September 12, 2008

A jury this week awarded \$5.5 million to the family of a man shot to death two years ago at a Hahnemann University Hospital parking-lot booth in a case that revealed an appalling lack of security, a civil attorney said yesterday.

Attorney Tom Kline, who argued the case against Hahnemann on behalf of victim William Palmer's family, said that the young man's death could have been prevented had the hospital implemented serious security changes.

"The things I uncovered in this were staggering," Kline said.

"The security breaches are truly staggering that any responsible institution, let alone a hospital, would put a young man in harm's way like they did."

Palmer, 18, a hardworking Roman Catholic High School graduate and son of Philadelphia police officers, was killed May 30, 2006, after being shot in the chest during an attempted robbery in the lot on Race Street near Broad.

After a six-day trial, the jury rendered its verdict Wednesday against Hahnemann, which is part of Tenet Healthcare Corp., of Dallas.

The case was heard before Common Pleas Judge Nitza Quinones Alejandro.

In an e-mailed statement, Hahnemann spokeswoman Coleen Cannon said that the hospital "continues to extend our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of William Palmer. His death was the result of a senseless act of violence, which saddens us all."



She added: "Videotape surveillance the hospital used to monitor the safety of the parking lot attendants was instrumental in the arrest and conviction" of the two men who committed the crime.

"We are disappointed by the verdict and we are reviewing our legal options," she said.

"Hahnemann takes the safety and well-being of our employees, patients and their families very seriously."

Kline, however, criticized what he found to be the lack of security measures at the parking lot, especially considering that an armed robbery had occurred at the same cashier booth just 12 days before Palmer was killed.

About 11 p.m. May 18, 2006, another parking-lot attendant was robbed at gunpoint by two men who fled with \$400. Afterward, Hahnemann "came up with five inadequate fixes," Kline said.

None included making the cashier's booth bulletproof or changing the parking-lot system so that it could operate unmanned during the unsafe night hours, although such changes had been considered, Kline said.

The fixes included installing a surveillance camera that overlooked the cashier booth, but that camera "wasn't even being watched by anyone" in security when Palmer was shot through the Plexiglas about 10:30 p.m., Kline said.

Another fix involved increasing outside security patrols to an hourly basis, but Kline said that evidence at trial showed that the last time a guard patrolled the booth that night was at 7:56.

Palmer worked for U.S. Security Associates Inc., which supplied lot attendants to Hahnemann.

The two men who attacked Palmer - triggerman Len Ellis and his lookout, Zaire Thompson - are serving life sentences.

Ellis pleaded guilty last year to first-degree murder.

Thompson was convicted by a jury last year of second-degree murder and robbery.

Ellis, who also was involved in the May 18 robbery, pleaded guilty in that case.

Kline yesterday said that Hahnemann and U.S. Security had suspected that the first robbery was an inside job and had considered Ellis, who had worked at Hahnemann before the May 18 robbery, as a potential suspect.

But after May 18, Hahnemann "never even circulated" Ellis' picture to its own security detail, Kline said.

Palmer's parents, Officers Teresa Graves and William Palmer, said that "the most gratifying thing about the verdict was that Hahnemann was held accountable for the failure to protect their son," Kline said. *