

# The Daily Pennsylvanian

## Lawyer investigates U. Penn student's death from meningitis

By Rebecca Kaplan, Daily Pennsylvanian

SOURCE: U. Penn

October 1, 2007

Almost one month after University of Pennsylvania sophomore Anne Ryan died from meningitis, a lawyer is questioning her medical treatment in the days prior to her sudden death.

Ryan, 19, made her first visit to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania on Sept. 6, when she had difficulty walking and was experiencing a high temperature and bad head and neck aches, according to a close friend of Ryan's who was in contact with her throughout the week.

Ryan's friend was granted anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, though a Philadelphia Daily News story confirmed this sequence of events with Ryan's brother, Jed, who could not be reached for comment for this article.

HUP released Ryan later that day after she opted not to stay overnight. Three days later, she was pronounced dead by HUP officials.

**Soon after Ryan died, her family hired Thomas Kline, a Philadelphia lawyer whose firm specializes in personal injury law. Kline wrote in an e-mail that he will "investigate the circumstances surrounding the death" and that he plans on obtaining her medical records.**

**His investigation aims to determine if Ryan's doctors ran sufficient tests and responded appropriately to her condition, the Daily News reported.**

James Turner of the American College Health Association pointed out that all types of meningococcal meningitis can be difficult to detect in its early stages, and its symptoms can suggest a number of diseases.

Upon request for comment, the family referred all questions to Kline.

Ryan's initial symptoms, which the Daily News said also included nausea and a rash, were common of meningococcal meningitis, a sometimes fatal bacterial disease that causes inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

Jed, a 1999 Penn alumnus, told Ryan's friend that Ryan had been given a spinal tap that "came back negative," indicating that she did not have meningitis.

At that point, Ryan elected not to spend the night in the hospital, choosing to go back to her brother's apartment.

The Daily News reported that a copy of the hospital's discharge report said Ryan was diagnosed with a viral infection. She was then given a prescription for an anti-nausea medication and advised to return for a follow-up within a week.

But three days later, Ryan was so sick that she couldn't stand, walk or talk, and she was in and out of consciousness.

She was taken to the hospital and died early Sept. 9.

Several hours later, the University sent a campus-wide statement identifying the cause of death as bacterial meningitis.

The University would not comment out of respect for the family's privacy, only saying in a brief statement that "Anne was cared for in a timely fashion with appropriate medical measures by a dedicated and highly skilled team of health care professionals."

All students who live on- campus are required to receive the vaccination unless exempted for medical reasons or religious beliefs.

Ryan did not live on campus this year. Kline is looking into whether she received it prior to last year, when she lived in Hill College House.

For now, questions remain about the strain of meningitis that Ryan had. Although four out of five strains are preventable by vaccination, one strain -- type B -- is not, though it is treatable.

After Ryan's death, the University treated Ryan's close contacts, such as friends and roommates.

No other cases were reported at Penn.