

Ex-patient at duPont hospital gets \$7 million

By Staff Writer
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The logo for The News Journal, featuring the title in a black, stylized, gothic-style serif font on a light beige background. A solid dark red horizontal bar is positioned directly beneath the text.

WILMINGTON-A federal jury Thursday returned a \$19.9 million verdict against du Pont Hospital for Children for negligence in allowing a visitor to accost a patient in 1994, but she will only receive \$7 million. Courtney Sparber, 19, of Gaiithersberg, M.D., had agreed to cap any award at \$7 million if the hospital agreed not to appeal the verdict, said hospital spokes-woman Terri Voelker.

Sparber, who suffers a painful nerve ailment, would have received \$200,000 under the agreement had the hospital won. "This will enable the terrible injuries this young girl suffered to be taken care of, " said her lawyer, Shanin Specter of Philadelphia. He said his client will spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair.

Voelker said that after a thorough investigation, the hospital is convinced the staff did nothing wrong. The five men and three women on the jury deliberated for a day and a half after the eight-day trial before senior U.S. District Judge Murray M. Schwartz. Sparber was being treated in 1994 for sympathetic reflex dystrophy in her left leg when Michael Myers, a 14-year-old who was visiting someone else, became obsessed with her, she testified during the trial. She complained to the hospital personnel about his harassment, but no one did anything.

One April 29 while Sparber was making a phone call at a nurses station, Meyers pulled away her crutch and she fell. After the fall, her condition worsened and spread to her right leg. She is now confined to a wheelchair and has continuous spasms of pain. She has undergone several operations, but her condition continues to worsen. Despite the ailment, Sparber reiterated her plans to attend medical school after the verdict. "I will be a doctor," she said as she left the courthouse.