



Dominic Guerrini of Kline & Specter. Courtesy photo

NEWS

Northwestern Pa. Jury Awards \$7.1M to Woman Blinded by Delayed Detection of Blood Clot

The plaintiff alleged that CT scans showed readily visible signs of abnormalities suggesting cerebral venous thrombosis, which the defendant missed.

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Medical Malpractice



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What You Need to Know

- An Erie County jury awarded \$7.1 million to a woman who was blinded by a blood clot that took nearly a week for doctors to detect.
- The plaintiff claimed a radiologist failed to detect clear signs of abnormalities on her CT scan.
- The jury found the defendant radiologist 90% responsible for the plaintiff's damages.

A northwestern Pennsylvania jury handed up a \$7.1 million verdict to a woman who was blinded by a blood clot that took nearly a week for doctors to detect.

The Erie County jury determined Sept. 27 that a radiologist who analyzed scans of plaintiff Allison Mitchell's brain was primarily responsible for the delay in diagnosis that caused Mitchell to lose her vision.

Mitchell, represented by Kline & Specter partner Dominic Guerrini alongside co-counsel Mark Polin and Patrick Fitzgerald, claimed she sustained permanent damage to her optic nerve from a cerebral venous thrombosis that doctors failed to diagnose and treat when she first presented to the hospital with symptoms.

She alleged that a significant cause of that delay was a radiologist's failure to catch what the plaintiffs contended was a clear indication of thrombosis in her brain scan.

According to pretrial memos, Mitchell, at the time 23, was admitted to Saint Vincent Hospital in November 2020 after she developed a severe headache and lost consciousness for several minutes. At the hospital, she underwent a CT scan of her head, which was then evaluated by Norristown-based radiologist Dr. Anil Bhardwaj with Foundation Radiology Group.

Bhardwaj did not find any concerning abnormalities in the scan but recommended that Mitchell get an MRI for further testing, according to the pretrial memos. Mitchell asserted that her doctors never ordered an MRI and that she was discharged after three days at the hospital while still feeling unwell.

Mitchell claimed her headache persisted after her discharge, and she returned several days later, at which point she noticed her vision deteriorating. During her second hospital stay, Mitchell said, doctors

diagnosed and successfully treated her for her cerebral venous thrombosis.

But by that point, Mitchell asserted, pressure build-up from the clot had already left her with nearly total vision loss.

Mitchell in part attributed the delay to Bhardwaj's evaluation of her CT scans. The plaintiff alleged that the scans showed readily visible signs of abnormalities suggesting cerebral venous thrombosis, which Bhardwaj missed.

But Bhardwaj, represented by Marshall Dennehey, asserted that the scans did not reveal any findings of concern and that he had acted appropriately by ordering an MRI.

Guerrini, Mitchell's lawyer, said plaintiffs counsel showed the jury images of normal scans compared to Mitchell's scans during the trial to demonstrate that there were clear abnormalities that Bhardwaj should have detected.

And when the verdict came down, the jury determined Bhardwaj was 90% responsible for the plaintiff's damages. The jury found Mitchell to be responsible for the remaining 10%.

Marshall Dennehey shareholder Melissa Dziak did not respond to requests for comment.

The verdict included about \$1.28 million in lost earnings, \$3.5 million in pain and suffering, and \$2.35 million in medical expenses. Judge David G. Ridge of the Erie County Court of Common Pleas presided over the case, captioned *Mitchell v. AHN Saint Vincent Hospital*.

Guerrini said conveying to a jury the impact of a blinding injury on a plaintiff's life can be difficult. "One of the most effective pieces of evidence," he said, was that Mitchell "wrote a letter to her former self that we were able to share with the jury."

Guerrini said the plaintiffs team worked with Mitchell to tell her story, including through a letter in which Mitchell explained to her past self the challenges her injuries have caused her.

He said, "She was her own best advocate."