

Emergency Room: Death Of Dehydrated Infant After Discharge Blamed On Nursing Negligence.

The mother brought her four year-old to the emergency room for symptoms of gagging and watery diarrhea.

The E.R. physician did not think the child was dehydrated. He prescribed Phenergan syrup for treatment of her nausea, told her mother to give her plenty of fluids and discharged her.

That night the child's condition worsened. She became lethargic and was not even able to hold her head up to take a drink. The diarrhea continued.

The mother called the hospital and spoke with a nurse. The mother claimed the nurse told her not to bring the child back to the hospital but instead to give the medication more time to work.

During the night the child's older brother found her in bed not breathing.

Discharge instructions are the responsibility of the hospital's nurses.

The nurses should have instructed the mother to bring her child back to the hospital if the child's condition worsened, that is, if the diarrhea persisted or the child became lethargic.

When the mother phoned the hospital that night, the nurse should have told her the same thing.

CIRCUIT COURT
JEFFERSON COUNTY, INDIANA
July 27, 2010

The child died. The autopsy identified dehydration from fluid volume loss due to diarrhea from enteric inflammation as the cause of death.

The family's lawsuit in the Circuit Court, Jefferson County, Indiana resulted in a judge's ruling finding only the hospital at fault and dismissing the E.R. physician and the manufacturer of the Phenergan syrup from the case.

The nurse's statement to the mother when she phoned in for advice was clearly erroneous, the judge ruled.

Earlier that day the E.R. nurses failed to carry out their responsibility to give complete and adequate discharge instructions to the mother, to bring the child back to the E.R. if her mental status changed for the worse or the diarrhea did not stop. ***Ritch v. Bernard, 2010 WL 4676343 (Cir. Ct. Jefferson Co., Indiana, July 27, 2010).***