Stress: High Cholesterol Can Be A Nurse's Occupational Disease.

In a recent unpublished opinion, the Court of Appeal of California accepted the proposition that a stroke coming on after increasing serum cholesterol levels can be considered a stress-related occupational disease for an ICU nurse.

The nurse's medical chart with her general practice physician showed a spike in her total cholesterol from 195 to 246 after she transferred to the ICU, then a moderate decline to 233 when she began taking medication, then a rise to 276 just before she stroked.

No Baseline Cholesterol Levels In The Doctor's Records

However, in this particular case, the court pointed out the nurse's medical chart did not contain any total-cholesterol levels going back before she started working in the ICU. More importantly, the court said, her doctor had no pre-ICU baseline cholesterol risk ratios for her.

If it could have been proven that her cholesterol risk ratio was benign to start with, but shifted in the direction of greater risk after she transferred to the ICU, it might have been possible to prove a connection between her high-stress job in the ICU and her stoke, making her stroke an occupational disease covered by worker's compensation.

Paradise Valley Hosp. v. Worker's Comp. Appeals Board, 2006 WL 75348 (Cal. App., January 13, 2006).