

Insulin Overdose: Nurse Ruled Liable For No-Code Patient's Death From Insulin Shock.

A ninety-year-old patient had been in the hospital several weeks for congestive heart failure. He was doing well, getting out of bed and sitting in his chair. He was due to be discharged, and his family members were making plans for home nursing care.

He was getting four or five units of insulin daily for diabetes mellitus during his hospital stay. The record in the Superior Court of New Jersey, Appellate Division, did not say whether this was regular or slow-release insulin.

On the day in question, a resident physician wrote an order for *four* units of slow-release insulin. A nurse misinterpreted the order and gave the patient *forty* units of slow-release insulin. As it was slow-release insulin, it took nearly a day for the patient to go into insulin

A resident physician ordered four units of insulin. The nurse misread the order. She gave forty units of slow-release insulin, from which the patient went into shock and died two days later. In the family's lawsuit, the court faulted the nurse.

He was a no-code patient. No attempt was made to resuscitate him. That did not make the nurse any less responsible for the patient's death.

SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY,
APPELLATE DIVISION, 1996.

shock. The treating physician recognized signs of insulin shock during morning rounds the next day. The physician moved the patient to the ICU, but, after consulting with the family, ordered that no extraordinary measures be taken to revive the patient, and the patient died.

In the family's civil lawsuit for damages, the court exonerated the resident and the treating physician from fault. The court laid the blame squarely on the nurse for deviating from accepted standards of nursing practice.

The court did not allow the nurse to argue in her defense in the family's civil suit that a choice was made not to try to revive the patient, or that his life expectancy was less than two years, to try to lessen her legal responsibility for the patient's death. **Ginsberg vs. St. Michael's Hospital, 678 A. 2d 271 (N.J. App., 1996).**