

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

VOLUME 165, NO. 118

LAW BULLETIN MEDIA

Defense verdict in maternal death suit

Mother died following emergency C-section at Oak Lawn hospital

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A Cook County jury rendered a defense verdict in favor of an Oak Lawn hospital after a woman died from a complication giving birth.

A verdict was reached June 6 after a trial before Associate Judge Israel A. Desierto.

The decedent, Julene Ricks-Ngwayah, went to Advocate Christ Medical Center on Dec. 9, 2012, to give birth.

Ricks-Ngwayah, 40, was admitted and monitored throughout the morning by resident Dr. Naima Bridges.

Around 1 p.m., Bridges ordered an amniotomy — the intentional rupture of the amniotic sac — and performed the procedure soon after.

Minutes later, Ricks-Ngwayah told a nurse she was “short of breath” and had “heaviness” in her chest.

She became unresponsive and, at the same time, the fetal monitor indicated the baby was in distress. An emergency C-section was ordered, court records stated.

The baby was delivered without issue, but the mother died. Doctors determined she died following an amniotic fluid embolism, a complication that can occur when amniotic fluid gets into the mother’s bloodstream.

Elias Ricks II, Ricks-Ngwayah’s husband, filed a lawsuit in 2014.

Neither side disputed the caused of death, but attorneys disputed whether the condition itself was preventable or predictable.

Plaintiffs’ attorneys argued Bridges should not have performed the amniotomy without supervision arguing she lacked experience.

They also contended that, according to her husband’s recollection, Bridges asked Ricks-Ngwayah to push down on her abdomen during the procedure, also known as applying fundal pressure, and minutes later she was unresponsive.

That technique was improper because it increases the likelihood of amniotic cells entering her bloodstream, they argued.

David C. Hall of Hall Prangle & Schoonveld LLC, one of the hospital’s attorneys, argued at trial that Bridges was qualified and able to perform the procedure without supervision.

Bridges testified that she did not ask the patient to apply fundal pressure herself, but instead asked her to “bear down” to make it easier to break her water bag.

Hall contended Ricks was “somewhat mistaken” and probably thought she was pushing down on her

stomach when she was “bearing down.”

Hall’s expert, Dr. Gary Dildy, who specializes in maternal and fetal medicine, testified it is a common occurrence for small amounts of fluid to get into a mother’s bloodstream and, in a percentage of cases, it can cause an amniotic fluid embolism and become fatal.

“There’s no pill to prevent it, it just happens,” Hall said. “Something about her DNA adversely reacted to her own baby’s cells, and that triggered cardiopulmonary collapse.”

The defense was also represented by Sabina Babel of Hall Prangle & Schoonveld LLC.

“I am satisfied because we were able to show the jury the truth of the medical facts of how this was a rare and unpreventable and unpredictable condition,” Hall said in an interview.

“This result was particularly satisfying knowing that my



David C. Hall

opponent is one of the finest attorneys in the city who generally prevails at the time of trial,” he added.

The plaintiffs were represented by Joseph A. Power Jr. and Kathryn L. Conway of Power Rogers & Smith P.C. as well as Michael F. Becker of The Becker Law Firm in Cleveland.

They could not be reached for comment.

The case is *Elias Ricks II v. Advocate Health and Hospitals Corporation*, 14 L 12504.



Cook County Circuit Court

Elias Ricks II v. Advocate Health and Hospitals Corp.

14 L 12504

Associate Judge Israel A. Desierto