

The Columbus Dispatch

OSU pays \$1.2 million in man's Legionnaires' death

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Sharron Morris sued Ohio State Medical Center after her husband, David, died after contracting Legionnaires' disease in Doan Hall.

Sharron Morris didn't want another family to watch a loved one die after contracting Legionnaires' disease from drinking water.

So she felt some satisfaction this week when Ohio State University Medical Center agreed to settle a lawsuit she'd filed over the death of her husband.

David Morris died in 2007, five months after he drank water from an OSU Medical Center faucet and came down with the disease.

"The important thing is getting it out into the community to let them know," Mrs. Morris said yesterday. "It was the only way I could get anyone to do anything."

Ohio State agreed on Thursday to pay Mrs. Morris \$1.2 million.

Mr. Morris, 66, of Lima, came down with Legionnaires' six days after he drank tap water on the ninth floor of the medical center's Doan Hall. His leukemia was in remission, and he was having an outpatient procedure when he drank the water to wash down medication.

Mrs. Morris' complaint says that nurses and other staff members on the ninth floor knew that the water could contain the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' but had been instructed not to tell patients to not drink the water.

Instead, staff members regularly gave patients bottled water and ice made from bottled water.

David Shroyer, Mrs. Morris' attorney, said signs warning that the water should not be consumed were added to the faucets after Mr. Morris got sick.

He said he doesn't know whether anyone else contracted Legionnaires' from the water and doesn't know whether the threat remains at Doan Hall.

OSU Medical Center spokesman David Crawford issued a statement saying that Ohio State believes the settlement "is fair and adequately compensates the family for the loss of their loved one," and that "the risk of contracting the disease is extremely low due to the safeguards we have in place."

Dr. Andrew Thomas, associate medical director at OSU, said the university installed special filters on some sinks and ice machines in the hospital in March 2007 to protect from Legionella bacteria, which is a common risk in older buildings with big plumbing systems.

"It's hard to eradicate," Thomas said. He said the medical center also is planning to add a system that would inject chlorine gas into the water to reduce the risk of the bacteria.

He said it is difficult to determine where anyone picks up the bacteria. Two other OSU patients have had Legionnaires' since Mr. Morris and possibly contracted it in the hospital. Both of them died of other medical problems, he said.

Medical Center employees who were deposed in the Morris case said that they knew it was not OK to drink the water on the ninth floor because Legionella was in the water. But although the staff gave patients bottled water, it did not warn them about drinking the tap water, employees testified.

Thomas said nurses now instruct patients not to drink the tap water.

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