

CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE CASE REPORT

Stephan Coetser v Alun Davies

Introduction

This claim arose from the negligent performance of operations to remove some of Mr Coetser's ribs to relieve thoracic outlet syndrome (pressure on veins and nerves between the base of the neck and the armpit). During the course of the second operation, Mr Coetser had a major bleed, his heart stopped and he suffered brain damage. When he came round, Mr Coetser was partially blind and to this day has significantly impaired vision.

The Facts

In early 2003 Mr Coetser, who was a very keen sportsman, began to suffer pins and needles in his arms and legs and a cold sensation in his arms. Mr Coetser was seen on a private basis by the Defendant, a vascular surgeon, who informed him that he was suffering thoracic outlet syndrome. This was causing his arteries to be compressed between his muscle and top rib. The Defendant advised that Mr Coetser required an operation to remove his top rib on both sides.

On 25th July 2003, Mr Coetser had an operation to remove his top ribs, but the wrong rib was removed mistakenly. Mr Coetser was told after the first operation of the need for a second operation to finish removing the ribs. The second operation took place on 1st August 2003. During this operation, Mr Coetser's artery and vein were damaged, causing him to suffer a major bleed and heart attack. Mr Coetser required internal heart massage and repair of the damage to the vein and artery.

Mr Coetser survived the operation but had to spend time in Intensive Care. On coming round, Mr Coetser complained of visual loss which was due to a lack of oxygen getting to his brain when his heart had stopped. Mr Coetser was left with a permanent blind spot.

Claimant's Case

Mr Coetser got the opinion of Mr Thompson, an expert in this area. He said that the treatment provided by the Defendant was not of an acceptable standard. He felt the Defendant had done a number of things wrong and did not have the required expertise to perform the operation successfully. He said that in any case, the operations were not unnecessary as Mr Coetser's symptoms were caused by excessive muscle gain and could have been cured if he had been advised to stop building upper body muscle.

As to the first operation, it was claimed that the Defendant removed the wrong rib and that he had failed to inform Mr Coetser of this fact. As to the second operation, it was claimed that the Defendant should have referred Mr Coetser to a specialist surgeon and failing to do this almost cost Mr Coetser his life.

Defendant's Case

The Defendant claimed that the he had told Mr Coetser that the operation was only one option and stopping body building would also help. It was also stated that he was warned about the risks attached to the procedure and that the injuries he suffered in the second operation were known risks of this treatment

Present Situation

Mr Coetser is South African and because he could no longer do the job he had trained for due to his impaired eyesight, he was prevented from staying in Britain. Mr Coetser, despite his disability made a remarkable recovery and required no ongoing professional care and assistance. He has continued to work (though not in his chosen career) and was recently married. He now lives in Australia.

Settlement

After negotiation Mr Coetser accepted the Defendant's offer of £400,000 to settle the claim.

If you would like any more information in this, or indeed any other matter, then please contact:

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