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Former cop settles for \$17.7M in medical negligence suit

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SUN-TIMES MEDIA WIRE

A \$17.7 million settlement was approved last week in a medical negligence lawsuit filed by a former Stone Park police officer — now a quadriplegic — against the University of Illinois Medical Center and a nursing staffing agency.

George Nissen, of Melrose Park, suffered a brain herniation when hospital staff failed to properly monitor his intracranial pressure during an external ventricular drain procedure, a release from attorneys Levin & Perconti said.

Nissen, now 47, was admitted on Feb. 13, 2005 after suffering a stroke believed to be caused by an injury he suffered during an altercation while making an arrest as a Stone Park police officer.

According to the release, due to the nursing staff's negligence, Nissen now suffers from quadriplegia, cannot eat or speak and can only communicate to family, friends and caregivers through eye movements and head shaking.

Doctors inserted an external ventricular drain to drain excess fluid from his brain and on Feb. 21, his doctors ordered the nursing staff to test the the drain by clamping it to determine if he was stable enough to remove it, the release said.

The suit claimed that during the procedure, nursing staff failed to properly monitor Nissen's intracranial pressure. Throughout the night, his brain pressure was at dangerous levels, but his caregivers failed to recognize the changes in his condition or notify a doctor when levels rose.

The lawsuit was filed against two UIC staff nurses, along with a healthcare staffing agency and an agency nurse who cared for Nissen that evening.

The UIC staff nurse assigned to Nissen failed to report his changing condition to a doctor and did not give the agency nurse who took over Nissen's care an adequate report at the end of the shift, the release said.

The settlement was reached just before a trial was to start, the release said. The family must now wait for the court to approve the settlement order, which is expected in the coming weeks, the release said.

In total, Nissen was approved a \$16.2 million settlement from the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center and \$1.5 million from a defendant nursing agency. The law firm announced the approval on Nov. 18.

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