



Man sues cancer center for wife's death

By Eric Peterson | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 2/26/2008 12:27 AM

A wrongful death lawsuit has been filed against Schaumburg-based Cancer Treatment Centers of America and its Midwestern Regional Medical Center in Zion on behalf of a woman whose husband says she died from an undiagnosed colon obstruction.

Maria Weidenfeller, 57, of Grand Rapids, Mich., died at the Zion facility on Sept. 23, 2006, at the end of her third weeklong visit for treatments for pancreatic cancer.

Her husband Ron said the cause of death was sepsis from an undiagnosed perforated colon, as revealed by an autopsy that he says facility staff had suggested he not pursue.

Early in the week she died, Maria Weidenfeller had already been complaining of severe pain, distention of her abdomen and constipation, her husband said.

The couple sought tests to make sure she had no bowel obstruction, but staff at the facility assured them she'd be fine, Ron Weidenfeller said.

"I have to say, they were doing very well until that last week," he said. "She was upbeat, especially when we found that the cancer markers had gone down."

He was expecting to pick up his wife to take her home to await her next treatment when he learned she was in intensive care. She died that day, before her adult sons could come see her.

His Chicago-based attorney, Steven Levin, said the lawsuit, filed late last week, doesn't represent a breakdown in negotiations with Cancer Treatment Centers, but is a place to begin.

"If you don't have a lawsuit on file, you really have no leverage or starting point," Levin said. "Our client was disappointed because he did not believe they had been candid with him about what happened."

The lawsuit is not seeking a specific sum -- apart from its being in excess of \$50,000 -- for the pain, suffering and wrongful death it accuses the treatment facility of causing, Levin said.

Cancer Treatment Centers spokesman Chris Hamrick said the company is aware of the lawsuit and reviewing it but is unable to comment on it at this early stage.