Actor James Woods Sues Over Brother's Wrongful Death

Eric Tucker, AP

A hospital did not do enough to care for the brother of James Woods when he went to the emergency room complaining of a sore throat and vomiting in 2006, a lawyer told jurors at the wrongful death lawsuit. Michael Woods died from heart disease at Kent Hospital in Warwick, RI on July 26, 2006, after going into cardiac arrest on a gurney. He was 49.

Attorney Mark Decof said in opening statements that the actor's brother wasn't seen by a doctor until an hour after he arrived and was initially treated in a section of the emergency room generally reserved for less-urgent cases. Even after an EKG came back abnormal, he was not given oxygen, aspirin or hooked up to heart monitoring to track further deterioration — all part of the standard of care in treating someone in Woods' condition, Decof said.

Instead, he was taken for additional X-rays and afterward left on a gurney in a hallway near a nurse's station because no room was available. He went into cardiac arrest and died nearly three hours after his arrival at the hospital.

Lawyers for the hospital said Woods’ symptoms were inconsistent with someone having a heart attack. They said he denied that he was having more typical symptoms, like chest pain, and even tried to downplay his illness by assuring a nurse that he was fine and didn't need so much attention.

Woods was overweight, had high blood pressure, an artery severely narrowed by plaque, and also suffered from myocardial ischemia, a condition caused by lack of blood flow to the heart. Decof said the death could have been prevented had hospital staff recognized Woods’ condition early enough, but lawyers for the hospital say his heart and arteries were already so diseased that there was no way to save him and that he died before any potentially lifesaving measures could have been taken.

Woods is suing along with his nephew Peyton, Michael's teenage son. Michael Woods, a businessman who lived in Warwick, was also an actor who appeared in several of his brother's movies and ran twice unsuccessfully for mayor of the city.

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