

## Symptoms and Risk Factors Not Recognized by Doctors

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# *Doctor's Misdiagnosis Causes Woman to Suffer a Stroke at Age 44*

**A**t the age of 44, the last thing Kathleen Colozzo expected was to have a heart attack. On April 28, 1995, the unexpected happened, and the doctors and nurses who Mrs. Colozzo trusted failed to properly diagnose her heart condition.

After finishing her dinner, Mrs. Colozzo began to feel ill. As her abdominal pain increased, Mrs. Colozzo, who is a licensed practical nurse, began to recognize that her symptoms were becoming serious. Her husband, Don, called 911. Mrs. Colozzo began to develop serious chest pains. When the paramedics arrived at the Colozzos' home, they initiated a cardiac protocol and transported Mrs. Colozzo to the hospital.

When Mrs. Colozzo arrived at the emergency room, the nurse and emergency room doctor focused on Mrs. Colozzo's gastric problems. Although Mrs. Colozzo had clearly indicated to the paramedics that her chief complaint was chest pain, the emergency room record reflects only epigastric pain. In addition to her chest pains, Mrs. Colozzo had several risk factors for heart disease which should have been recognized by the nurses and emergency room doctor. The results of the blood work showed a very high CPK level, which can be indicative of a heart attack. In spite of Mrs. Colozzo's symptoms and laboratory findings, the emergency room physician chose to focus on her gastrointestinal symptoms and discharged Mrs. Colozzo with a diagnosis of gastritis. Although gastrointestinal distress frequently accompanies a cardiac event, neither the doctors nor the nurses considered the possibility. A simple EKG, which could have been ordered by the doctor or the nurses, would have ruled out or confirmed a heart attack.

The next day, April 29, 1995, Mrs. Colozzo again developed chest pains. This time, her husband drove her to the hospital where the couple had to wait for over

an hour before being seen by a physician. In spite of Mrs. Colozzo's severe chest pains, the couple was told by a nurse that the hospital had "priorities" and that they would have to wait. When Mrs. Colozzo was finally seen by a physician, he immediately recognized that Mrs. Colozzo was experiencing an evolving myocardial infarction which required emergency treatment. Mrs. Colozzo was admitted to the hospital and administered blood thinners in an attempt to minimize any further damage to her heart. Unfortunately, the injury to her heart muscle had begun the day before. The damage was permanent.

On May 1, 1995, Mrs. Colozzo underwent a cardiac catheterization which documented the extensive damage to her heart muscle. When Mr. Colozzo returned

*A simple EKG, ordered by either doctors or nurses, would have clarified the possibility of a heart attack.*

to the hospital the next morning to see his wife, he found her unresponsive. Mrs. Colozzo was found to have suffered a left middle cerebral artery stroke. The stroke left Mrs. Colozzo with severe brain damage. After several years of intensive therapy, Mrs. Colozzo was still left with right-sided weakness, severe depression, and an inability to speak, in addition to greatly diminished heart function.

Attorney Bill Norton, along with co-counsel James Torres of the law firm of Alpizar, Ville, Torres & Camfield in Palm Bay, litigated this case. They argued that Mrs. Colozzo's stroke was caused by the damage done to her heart as a result of the doctors' and nurses' failure to diagnose her serious heart condition. The case settled shortly before trial for \$1.15 million. ■