

\$12.5 million settlement in claims against hospital, medical team for lack of care for pregnant woman

Failure to provide proper care during pregnancy resulted in mother's death

Preeclampsia is a well-known, life-threatening, pregnancy-specific blood pressure disorder. It typically occurs after 20 weeks gestation and may occur abruptly during labor or the postpartum period following delivery. Left untreated, preeclampsia can lead to serious – even fatal – complications for both mother and baby. Doctors are trained to diagnose and treat mothers experiencing preeclampsia. The treatment is not complicated. It requires immediate management with medications to lower the mother's blood pressure (anti-hypertensive medications called calcium channel blocker), and medications to prevent the onset of seizures (magnesium sulfate administered as a neuroprotective treatment). The symptoms of preeclampsia are not hard to recognize: high blood pressure, severe headaches, protein in urine, decreased levels of platelets in blood, increased liver enzymes, shortness of breath, nausea, or vomiting.

If preeclampsia is left untreated, the mother may develop life-threatening eclampsia which may result in seizures, brain damage, coma, HELLP syndrome (hemolysis elevated liver enzymes and low platelet count) causing organ damage – all of which can be fatal.

Sara Wilson (not her real name) was an extraordinary woman – young, brilliant, funny, and beautiful. After meeting John, the couple fell in love, married, and embarked on what was to be an extraordinary life together. When the couple learned that they were expecting their first child, they were delighted. Sara's pregnancy progressed to full term without complications. A few days before her due date, Sara began experiencing labor contractions, prompting the couple to go straight to the hospital. During admission to the labor/delivery department, nurses noted that Sara's blood pressure was very high – much higher than Sara had reported throughout the pregnancy. Sara also reported a severe headache. Although the health care team noted these critical findings, they did not note the symptoms as a possible onset of preeclampsia. Doctors, therefore, failed to start the standard treatment with life-saving medications needed to lower her blood pressure and prevent seizures.

Shortly after delivering her son, Sara developed eclampsia and HELLP syndrome. She complained of shortness of breath, disorientation, and vomiting. She then became unresponsive and began seizing. By the time the medical team realized what was happening and began to treat her eclampsia, it was too late. Sara suffered a fatal intracranial hemorrhage and died.

John was devastated by his wife's death. With his entire world upended by grief, he was referred to Searcy Law attorneys **Cameron Kennedy** and **Chris Searcy** and asked for their help in understanding what had happened to his wife. After obtaining the medical records, securing an autopsy, and engaging medical experts specializing in labor and delivery management, Mr. Kennedy brought claims against the hospital, doctors, and nurses, alleging that they had breached the standard of care by failing to recognize Sara's clear signs and symptoms of preeclampsia during labor. They had failed to follow standard treatment protocols for Sara's condition. During pre-suit discovery, Mr. Kennedy secured the hospital's policies and procedures for maternal/newborn care regarding eclampsia/preeclampsia. It established evidence that the policy was not properly implemented by the health-care team and therefore had resulted in her wrongful death.

Faced with this evidence, the parties reached a confidential settlement agreement resulting in a \$12.5 million settlement. Navigating life in Sara's absence will be heartbreakingly difficult for John and their son. However, with brave determination our clients brought this case to a conclusion by holding to account those responsible for Sara's tragic death. ♦

