

Heparin case awakens feelings of anger, fear



Flanked by attorneys Pamela Borgess and David Zoll, Johanna Staples, center, said her husband, Dennis Staples, may have been a victim of a contaminated blood thinner.

Dennis Staples was planning his 60th birthday party - an affair that kept his spirits high even as his body was struggling with the effects of diabetes and kidney disease.

A day before he was set to celebrate, he slipped into a coma. Soon after, he died.

Yesterday, the wife of the former local radio personality appeared with her attorneys to talk about her husband's death and her eventual realization that a contaminated drug may have been a contributing factor.

Johanna Staples has become another face of the many lawsuits being filed against Baxter Healthcare Corp., a leading manufacturer of the blood-thinner heparin.

"I was beginning to make peace over his loss and then I find out," she said yesterday, adding that it was more than a month after her husband's Dec. 17 death that Baxter publicly announced the recall of heparin.

"I wouldn't be true to the situation if I didn't tell you that it made me angry, it made me frustrated, and it made me frightened for others."

Mrs. Staples was one of four local residents who filed lawsuits in U.S. District Court in Toledo Wednesday. Others were filed by family members of Loretta LaCourse, 78; Vivian Colquitt, 56, and Lawrence Matten, 68, all of Toledo.

Each died soon after being injected with heparin during their hemodialysis treatments, the lawsuits said.

The most recent filings mean that now seven lawsuits against Baxter and its suppliers have been filed locally. Several more have been filed nationwide.

Attorney David Zoll, whose law firm filed the lawsuits locally, said yesterday that a hearing has been scheduled to determine if the lawsuits filed nationwide would be consolidated into one court.

Mr. Zoll said the federal Food and Drug Administration has determined that the heparin sold by Baxter had been chemically modified with a cheaper substance that was designed to look like heparin.

In some cases, up to 50 percent of the heparin by volume was replaced with the contaminant - over-sulfated chondroitin sulfate.

"It would be as if you added sand to an aspirin," he said by way of example.

A Baxter spokesman said recently that, to date, there have been four death reports that show Baxter's heparin was administered to a patient followed by adverse reactions and then death. But there have been no confirmed deaths caused by heparin.

Mr. Staples' career in broadcasting spanned three decades, including 13 years at WRQN-FM (93.5) where he and longtime sidekick Bob Kelly were employed as the morning talent.

Mrs. Staples told The Blade during an interview for his obituary that her husband's health eventually forced him to retire in 2006 and that he signed off for the final time from his morning program on Aug. 17, 2006.

Mr. Staples had been receiving hemodialysis since August, 2005, because of problems with diabetes and kidney disease. He required hemodialysis four times a week.

Heparin is given to patients on hemodialysis to ensure that their blood doesn't clot while cycling through the dialysis machine.

Yesterday, Mrs. Staples said her husband's health was fair, but his spirits were great in his final days.

She said her family considered the days with Mr. Staples as "precious" and she was angry that any may have been stolen from her family.

- Erica Blake

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