

## GR jury awards \$755k for misdiagnosis

### Kelly Robinson sued, won over 2008 treatment

Updated: Wednesday, 25 Apr 2012, 6:16 PM EDT  
Published : Wednesday, 25 Apr 2012, 5:03 PM EDT

- By Joe LaFurgey

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - In November 2008, **Kelly Robinson had a sore throat** and went to the emergency room at **Spectrum Butterworth** in Grand Rapids. Her vital signs were normal and there was no obvious sign of a severe problem, so she was sent home.

Hours later, she returned to the ER as her condition had worsened. There were **signs of a serious infection** in her neck. But after seeing a physician's assistant assigned to the ER, Robinson was given a pain reliever and sent home.

That infection would develop into a **flesh-eating bacteria**.

It was **only on her third trip to the ER** that a correct diagnosis was made.

At this point, **her attorney Kevin Lesperance** told 24 Hour News 8 Wednesday, "She was now in **septic shock** . The infection had spread to the **fascia**, which is the lower tissue that covers the muscles."

A portion of her palate and a portion of her neck had to be removed. Robinson spent over a month in a coma, plus a year-and-a-half on a feeding tube. She still has trouble eating and her speech may never be the same.

She sued the hospital and the physician's assistant, and this week a **Kent County jury awarded her \$755,485**.

Of that money, **\$155,485 will go to the State of Michigan** to cover the costs of Robinson's treatment covered by Medicaid. She'll use the rest to **pay up legal and other expenses**, and go back to school.

Robinson, who lost her home during her illness, has recovered to the point where she's no longer considered disabled. She has started a new job.

Robinson declined to speak with 24 Hour News 8, but her attorney Lesperance did.

"She doesn't sound the same. She doesn't eat the same. But she's a fighter," he said.

The use of physicians assistants has steadily increased over the years.

"According to the jury and according to our experts," Lesperance said, "the physicians assistant dropped the ball" by not picking up on the diagnosis and not calling for a doctor to look at Robinson.

More than **3,800 physicians assistants are in Michigan** . Generally, they have a number of jobs, from conducting physical exams to ordering and interpreting tests to diagnosing and treating illnesses. They have to be properly educated, **licensed by the state** and work under the supervision of a doctor.

Advertisement



That was the biggest concern in the Robinson case.

"Didn't pick up on the fact that something was seriously wrong. Didn't provide all of the information to the physician, and," Lesperance said, "didn't ask the physician to come in and see the patient."

He hopes the verdict against Spectrum and the specific physicians assistant serves as a wake-up call.

"We obviously don't have any control over what the hospital does," he said. "I would hope that they would make some changes in the way that they're using physicians assistants."

**Spectrum** officials aren't commenting on the lawsuit beyond saying they're still considering their options.