

Mediation vs. lawsuit

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 by Healthcheck Reporter Ali Gorman

ABINGTON, Pa. - March 27, 2008 (WPVI) -- Over the past three years Pennsylvania has lost more than 16-hundred doctors. Many left because the skyrocketing number of medical lawsuits made getting malpractice insurance too expensive. Now Abington Memorial Hospital has a plan they say will help fix the problem.

Lillian Scher was married to her husband Julius for 35 years. But five years ago, he fell, and she brought him to Abington Memorial Hospital's E.R.

She said a doctor ran tests but said nothing was wrong

"As he's giving me the discharge papers, my husband passed out," she explained.

Her husband never woke up and died 3 days later. Lillian wanted answers but instead of filing a lawsuit she went through a mediation pilot program.

The program was officially announced on Thursday at the hospital. Its goal is to try to work out disputes or concerns of patients with doctors using a mediator instead of going to court.

"I think it brings the doctor - patient relationship back to where it ought to be," said Roger Mecum the CEO of the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

Roger said the program is voluntary and won't take away a patient's right to go to court at any time but it offers an alternative.

"The courtroom process itself can be timely and costly no matter what the outcome," said Robert Slota who is the former president of the Montgomery Bar Association.

In Scher's case the hospital said her husband was misdiagnosed. She was compensated, got answers and hopefully prevented what happened to her family from happening again.

"Because I know what I went through and I wouldn't wish it on anyone else."

The pilot program at Abington Memorial Hospital was funded mostly through professional grants. It cost about \$35,000 to get started but lawyers said could save up to 100-times that amount. Lawmakers want to bring the program to other parts of Pennsylvania.

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