

Heat death victim's family sues Las Vegas hospital, addiction center



Melissa Gallia, a 50-year-old Las Vegas native who died of heat illness in July, is the subject of a wrongful death lawsuit. (Murdock & Associates)

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Las Vegas Review-Journal

May 28, 2025 - 6:05 pm



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Updated May 28, 2025 - 6:33 pm

After losing her mother and suffering from a bout of alcoholism, Melissa Gallia checked herself into a Las Vegas addiction center to seek treatment.

Found dead on the ground in a parking lot two days later, the MGM

employee and mother of two had succumbed to environmental heat stress on a July day that reached 107 degrees. Two days before her 51st birthday, Gallia became [one of 527 people who died last year at least in part because of extreme heat in Clark County](#).

“What happened to Melissa should never happen to anyone else,” said Robert Murdock, a Las Vegas attorney representing Gallia’s family.

A wrongful death lawsuit was filed Tuesday in Clark County District Court, alleging that Desert Hope Treatment Center and Sunrise Hospital and Medical Center failed to notify her family of both her transfer to the hospital and her discharge. Instead, doctors suggested in notes that she exhibited “drug-seeking behavior” and was discharged to her home, according to records cited in the complaint.

“There was just issue upon issue, problem upon problem,” Murdock said. “Ultimately, she was discharged, allowed to wander around and died in a parking lot right from the heat.”

American Addiction Centers, the parent company of Desert Hope Treatment Center, did not return multiple requests for comment on Wednesday. A spokeswoman for Sunrise Hospital declined to comment but said the facility “remains sympathetic to the details that have been made public.”

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages.

‘Reckless and malicious’

It was a call from the Clark County coroner’s office on July 2 that finally told Gallia’s husband, Bart, where his wife had been, according to the complaint.

That was after a Desert Hope nurse called him at 3:28 a.m. asking if he knew where she was, and he rushed to Sunrise Hospital to get answers. Desert

Hope staff called Bart Gallia on the morning of June 30 but hadn't notified him of the transfer until after she was dead, according to the complaint.

Melissa Gallia had been experiencing worsening hallucinations that weren't responsive to medication, causing Desert Hope to send her to a hospital. She arrived at 5:54 a.m. but wasn't admitted until 11:06 a.m., the complaint alleges.

Alcohol addiction withdrawal can cause vivid hallucinations that can last up to three days after an addict's last drink, according to Harvard Medical School.

The memo of her condition didn't reach Sunrise Hospital, which only treated her for a bladder infection and didn't have a record of her insurance or her employment. Melissa Gallia, a Las Vegas native, had been a member of Culinary Local 226 for nearly 20 years.

"The actions of Defendants and each of them are outrageous, willful, wanton, reckless and malicious," the complaint reads. "In sum, Melissa Gallia died, and died alone, in a parking lot adjacent to Sunrise Hospital due to the actions and inactions of the Defendants."

Sworn expert testimony in complaint

In the filing, two medical professionals commented on the standard of care Melissa Gallia received, one from the University Health System in San Antonio, Texas, and another from Buena Vista Health and Recovery in Arizona.

Both identify confusing gaps in the facilities' documentation and failings at multiple stages in the process, including in the lack of notification to Melissa Gallia's family.

“The law already requires that a discharge has to be proper,” said Murdock, the family’s attorney. “I can’t just discharge somebody and throw them out on the street. That’s, in effect, what happened here.”

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