



Patient-8

Patient left paralyzed after an unsuccessful spinal cord surgery. Testimony of two doctors changed, they lied under oath, shifting the blame to the anesthesiologist in order protect each other.

A patient, Melodie Simon, had [a spinal cord operation on August 3, 2000](#), at Sunrise Hospital by Dr. John Thalgott, but Dr. Thalgott had a planned vacation and left the patient in Dr. Mark Kabins' care.

The day after the surgery, the patient experienced a spinal fluid leak. The anesthesiologist, Dr. Dan Burkhead, put in a catheter to drain the fluid but had trouble, stabbing her repeatedly.

Her condition deteriorated, and on August 9, Kabins performed a second surgery to clean out an epidural hematoma. The government and the defense will present witnesses who will disagree over whether the delay in operating on Simon was substandard care. Thalgott said he wouldn't have waited.

Her opinion of Thalgott, the spinal surgeon who performed the operation that had such horrible consequences?

Simon hesitated just a moment. "Arrogant asshole."

Moments later, Thalgott was proving her correct, telling a story of greed, selfishness and self-preservation. Thalgott is one of the federal government's two star cooperating witnesses who admit they were insiders in the conspiracy. He and Dr. Ben Venger have immunity for their testimony.

Thalgott's testimony was compelling, though disgusting.

When Thalgott learned of Simon's deterioration, "I was horrified. This was the worst possible thing that could happen to a spinal cord physician."

Oh, and he did feel horrible for Simon.

He thought that if he was successfully sued and this happened again, he would be uninsurable and wouldn't be able to practice. So, he asked Awand if he could protect the surgeons from being sued.

Gage, Awand and the two surgeons met in 2001 to discuss Simon, although no lawsuit had been filed.

"It struck me as a little odd," Thalgott said. The meeting began with attorney Noel Gage saying: "Are we going to have a meeting that never happened?"

Thalgott said they agreed to place all the blame on Burkhead to protect the two surgeons. In January 2002, the anesthesiologist was sued; the surgeons were not.

Thalgott gave his deposition May 15, 2002, blaming Burkhead entirely. On Thursday, he admitted that was a lie.

Now he contends Kabins' delay in operating after a probable spinal epidural hematoma was diagnosed probably contributed to Simon's paralysis.

Why was he willing to lie under oath and shift all the blame to someone else? "It's only natural to circle the wagons for one of the people you work with," Thalgott said.

That attitude launches a lot of corrupt cover-ups today. Protect yourself and the ones you know and to hell with everyone else.

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Their motto seems to be: "Protect yourself and the ones you know-- and to hell with everyone else."

A patient was paralyzed after an unsuccessful spinal cord surgery.

The two doctors worked together to place the blame on the anesthesiologist in order to protect each other. They lied under oath.

Just say NO to Sunrise Hospital

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