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Law & Order

\$7.7M settlement in malpractice suit

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MORRISTOWN: A 23-year-old Sussex woman who is a paraplegic due to an undetected spinal tumor won a \$7.7 million settlement yesterday in a medical malpractice lawsuit, her attorney said.

Cindy Hotalen's case was about to go to trial before Superior Court Judge Thomas Harper in Morristown when the parties reached the settlement, said Jeff Korek, the Englewood attorney who worked on the case with his associate, Michael Fruhling.

The defendants were: Radiologic Associates of Northern New Jersey and Pennsylvania; Matthew T. Skalla; Neuro Specialists of Morris-Sussex; Infanta A. Stephen; the Orthopedic Center; Mark Rieger, Spine and Orthopedic Center of New Jersey and doctors David Basch, Allan L. Gardner and Eugene Hrabarchuk, according to court papers.

In 2001, Hotalen, then 17, went to a physician complaining of numbness in her right leg. Radiologists misread her MRI, Korek said. The MRI report followed her over the next two years as she sought help for her condition, Korek said.

She finally was diagnosed with the tumor in 2003, after another MRI was performed. Over the years, the condition worsened and she is now expected to be in a wheelchair for the rest of her life, Korek said.

"Anyone who doesn't understand why there should not be curbs on malpractice suits should look at this case," Korek said.

The tumor, had it been detected early, had a 95 percent cure rate, he said.