

*Doctor's office misses signs of pneumonia, sepsis*

Settlement reached for man sent home despite "classic" symptoms

Gichuhi Murage felt lousy. He had chest pain, chills, the sweats and a fever. So he called his primary care doctors and then went to their office for an examination. But instead of a doctor, he was seen by a nurse practitioner who told him he merely had the flu and sent him home. She did not run diagnostic tests nor did she consult with one of the physicians on hand.

Murage, a Ph.D, married with eight-year-old twin daughters, did what so many patients do – as he was told. He went home. Five days later, at the age of 47, he was dead.

It was later discovered that Murage had been suffering from bacterial pneumonia and sepsis which, left untreated, resulted in multi-organ failure.

In a lawsuit filed following the January 2000 incident, it was noted that Murage's 102.3-degree fever, low blood pressure and other symptoms were classic signs of dehydration and sepsis and that he had been in need of immediate medical care.

Yet despite Murage's chest pain, the nurse had not ordered a chest x-ray or lab studies. She had recorded his lungs as clear but acknowledged later that she had not evaluated all lobes. Murage was not seen by a doctor nor did the nurse even speak with one of the attending physicians. No antibiotic was prescribed.

The suit and investigation of the case also uncovered an attempted cover-up of sorts after Murage's death. Nearly a month later, the nurse called Murage's home and left a message for his wife in which the nurse claimed she had tried to convince Murage to go to an emergency room on that fateful day. She later admitted the statement was untrue. A Kline & Specter attorney also found that a medical record had been altered to convey the same falsehood.

The case resulted in a multi-million dollar settlement.