

## Verdict awards \$2.8 million in suit against doctor, hospital

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An Anne Arundel County jury has awarded \$2.8 million to the family of a woman who died after her gall bladder was removed at Anne Arundel Medical Center.

The verdict, announced late Friday, was against Dr. George Linhardt Jr., an Annapolis surgeon, and the medical center. The physician's attorney and hospital officials said they plan to appeal the decision, in a case tried before Circuit Judge H. Chester Goudy Jr.

The wrongful death suit was brought by the family of Mary Madden, a 58-year-old Mayo woman whose gall bladder was removed during a laparoscopic procedure at the hospital in December 1991. Laparoscopy involves making small incisions through which surgeons thread tools to perform operations,

rather than making large incisions to do so.

Shortly after surgery, Mrs. Madden suffered from symptoms including cold sweats, abdominal pain, a low-grade temperature and an abnormally rapid heart rate, said her family's attorneys. But she was discharged and died of an infection in the abdominal cavity two days after surgery, said attorneys Stephen L. Snyder and Robert T. Weltchek.

Mr. Snyder said Dr. Linhardt should have evaluated Mrs. Madden before or after the surgery, to make sure no gallstones had migrated from her gall bladder, because she had a history of that problem. The autopsy found that Mrs. Madden died because a gallstone had become impacted and caused an infection, peritonitis.

Dr. Linhardt's attorney this year asked the state's chief medical examiner to review her cause of

death. Attorney David Levin, who represents Dr. Linhardt, said that if Mrs. Madden had died from infection, all of her organs would have been damaged, but they were not. The medical examiner's office — and an independent review by the University of Maryland — agreed, Mr. Levin said.

The death certificate was changed to show cardiac arrhythmia, or an irregular beating of the heart, as the cause of death.

Mr. Levin said he was surprised by the verdict. "Frankly, the jury was out for two days, and I thought they had a better grasp of it," he said.

Hospital officials said they also believe Mrs. Madden died of a heart problem.

"We continue to believe that the care we provided was appropriate," said Mary Lou Baker, spokeswoman for Anne Arundel Medical Center. "It was a very surprising verdict."