

Wrock-Ryland vs. Karroum, SmithKline

In August 1996, Martie Wrock-Ryland noticed a dark growth on the nape of her neck. She went to her dermatologist, who removed the growth at the skin level and sent it to SmithKline Beecham Laboratories for evaluation. Dr. John Karroum, a dermatopathologist employed by SmithKline, reviewed the tissue sample. His pathology report stated that the growth was a basal cell carcinoma and, therefore, Ms. Wrock-Ryland needed no further treatment.

Five months later, Ms. Wrock-Ryland noticed another small growth in roughly the same spot as the one removed in August. She again went immediately to her dermatologist, who again cut off the growth and sent it to SmithKline Beecham Laboratories. Dr. Karroum again examined the tissue sample and this time rendered a diagnosis of malignant melanoma. Ms. Wrock-Ryland then underwent a procedure called a complete wide excision, where all the tissue surrounding the area of the melanoma was removed. The melanoma was of minimal depth and Ms. Wrock-Ryland's prognosis looked good.

In October 1998, Ms. Wrock-Ryland, while showering, discovered a lump in her armpit. A subsequent examination revealed that she had a lymph node which was positive for malignant melanoma. The melanoma was spreading, and in April 1999 her doctors found another positive lymph node.

At about that same time, Ms. Wrock-Ryland was watching a TV news program about a lady whose melanoma was misdiagnosed by a SmithKline Beecham pathologist. Concerned that this may have happened to her, Ms. Wrock-Ryland visited Dr. Steven Rosenberg, a West Palm Beach dermatologist. Dr. Rosenberg obtained the original biopsy sample from August 1996. He arranged for a subsequent review by a dermatopathologist from the University of Miami, which revealed that Dr. Karroum had misread the initial biopsy sample. In fact, Ms. Wrock-Ryland had malignant melanoma all along.

Attorneys Greg Barnhart and Sean Domnick were retained by Ms. Wrock-Ryland. The plaintiff's experts testified that Dr. Karroum's negligence was the cause of Ms. Wrock-Ryland's cancer spreading. They testified that if Dr. Karroum had correctly diagnosed the malignant melanoma in September 1996, appropriate treatment would have cured Ms. Wrock-Ryland. Conversely, permitting the melanoma to grow for five months allowed the cancer to spread.

Recently, Mr. Barnhart and Mr. Domnick were able to reach a confidential settlement with SmithKline Beecham Laboratories and Dr. Karroum. Ms. Wrock-Ryland currently undergoes CAT scans and physical examinations every three months. She also continues her crusade to make people aware of the dangers of melanoma. ■

