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VERDICTS &
SETTLEMENTS

Aria Health Hit With \$5.7M Verdict After Patient Jumps From Window

Aria Health System has been hit with a roughly \$5.7 million verdict after a mentally impaired man admitted for self-inflicted stab wounds was left alone and leaped out of a fourth-floor window.

BY P.J. D'ANNUNZIO

Williams v. Aria Health

\$5.7M Verdict

Date of Verdict:

March 8.

Court and Case No.:

C.P. Philadelphia No. 150800587.

Judge:

John M. Younge.

Type of Action:

Medical malpractice.

Injuries:

Broken jaw, ankles and heels;
fractured his vertebrae.

Plaintiffs Counsel:

Thomas Duffy, Duffy + Partners,
Philadelphia.

Defense Counsel:

Peter J. Hoffman, Eckert Seamans
Cherin & Mellott, Philadelphia.



Tom Duffy

Comment:

Aria Health System has been hit with a roughly \$5.7 million verdict after a mentally impaired

man admitted for self-inflicted stab wounds was left alone and leaped out of a fourth-floor window.

The Philadelphia jury that heard plaintiff Charles P. Williams' case against Aria, owner of Aria Frankford and Torresdale Hospitals, where Williams was treated, awarded him \$5.5 million for pain and suffering and \$215,000 for economic loss. Williams' lawsuit claimed that Aria failed to properly monitor him under its care and failed to diagnose him as a suicide risk.

Williams was taken to Aria's hospital in the Frankford neighborhood of Philadelphia at 4 a.m. July 17, 2014. Police initially thought he had been the victim of an assault and intoxicated by narcotics use, but a drug test came back negative, according to the plaintiff's court papers. Police later established that it was Williams who stabbed himself in the abdomen multiple times, though the wounds were superficial.

He was transferred to Aria Torresdale at 7 a.m., with the ambulance crew noting he was incoherent and speaking rapidly. According to court papers, Dr. Clifton Hall wrote in a preoperative report that Williams "appears to be psychiatrically impaired."

At 10 a.m. Williams was sent to a fourth-floor room for monitoring,

where he sat quietly for nearly 14 hours until he smashed a window with a chair and leaped out, landing on the lawn below, court papers said.

Williams' lawyer said the man suffered a broken jaw, ankles and heels, and fractured his vertebrae, requiring extensive surgery.

Thomas Duffy of Duffy + Partners in Philadelphia, who represented Williams, said the hospital was clearly at fault, and lauded the jury's verdict.

"I thought it was a fair and correct result," he said. "I think the negligence of the hospital and personnel was clear. And I think the amount was very fair and reasonable given the extent of Charles Williams' injuries."

However, in its pretrial memorandum, Aria claimed that its physicians and hospital staff acted within the standard of care in treating Williams, claiming that they could not be blamed for thinking Williams was high on PCP.

"The fact that the toxicology screen was negative does not mean there were no intoxicants affecting the plaintiff," defense papers said, adding, "The plaintiff's wounds did not appear to be self-inflicted to the clinicians, and the plaintiff denied suicidal ideation on the suicide risk

assessment done in the ER, and at the time he was admitted to the floor at the Torresdale campus."

Aria claimed there was nothing hospital staff could have done to prevent Williams from jumping out of a window.

"The plaintiff denied a history of psychiatric difficulties, and reported he had been stabbed by someone else," defense papers said. "There was no clear evidence of the patient having a psychiatric disorder that would lead to self-destructive behavior. Even after the patient's fall, two Aria Health psychiatrists found no evidence of acute suicide risk, depression, anxiety or psychotic symptoms."

Aria's lawyer, Peter J. Hoffman of Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, declined to comment.

— P.J. D'Annunzio, of the Law
Weekly •

*Reporter at the Legal Intelligencer
covering public corruption, federal
courts, and breaking news.*