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A fatal complication

From the Journal Sentinel

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On June 28, 2004, four days after being admitted, Patricia Stropes was walking around the halls of All Saints Medical Center and no longer complained of shortness of breath. On that day she also signed consent forms for a heart catheterization, as well as angioplasty and stent placement, if needed. She also consented to possible emergency bypass surgery in the event of a complication.

During the catheterization the next day, after the diagnostic portion showed blockages in several arteries, cardiologist Cornell Cohen decided to place a stent in the left anterior descending artery. This account of what happened next is based on records from mediation, litigation and the hospital.

About 10 a.m. After the balloon and wire became lodged in the artery and after two attempts to place the stent, Cohen ends the procedure.

10:30 a.m. Cohen consults with heart surgeon Thomas Barragry. Stropes is taken to her room. She is stable, according to Carol Meils, director of cardiology at All Saints. "She was brought back into a situation where you wouldn't normally have a surgical backup," Meils said.

11:15 a.m. Stropes is returned to the cath lab after her blood pressure begins to drop substantially. Before bringing her back to the lab, Cohen makes arrangements to prepare a cardiac surgery operating room. Cohen is concerned that the sac around Patricia Stropes' heart might be filling with blood. "I told myself, 'It's OK, they're going to fix it,' " said her husband, Stephen Stropes. Before she went into surgery, he said, his wife could not speak, she had no color and her blood pressure was dropping.

11:56 a.m. Stropes leaves Cohen's care.

12:07 p.m. Stropes is in the operating room.

1 p.m. Barragry begins emergency bypass surgery.

An echocardiogram shows that Stropes' left ventricle (the heart's main pumping chamber) is completely compressed. "A huge amount of blood was evacuated from the pericardium (the sac around the heart) and blood pressure recovered," Barragry wrote.

Doctors begin to wean her off the heart-lung machine, but her right ventricle, which pumps blood into the lungs, is not working properly. Stropes is put back on the heart-lung machine for another hour. "Again, her right ventricle failed and the patient expired in the operating room," Barragry wrote.

5:28 p.m. Stropes is pronounced dead.

Her husband says Barragry broke the news, and Cohen "shook my hand and said, 'I'm sorry.' "

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