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California: This just in

L.A. County settles medical malpractice case for \$4.5 million

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MARCH 31, 2015, 7:30 PM

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday agreed to pay \$4.5 million to a man left paralyzed after treatment at L.A. County/USC Medical Center.

In addition, the settlement with former patient Justin Malone calls for the county to waive his estimated \$790,000 in treatment costs and to cover the approximately \$200,000 Malone would have had to repay MediCal as a result of the county's award.

Malone was a 27-year-old hardwood floor installer when he was involved in a motorcycle crash in the San Fernando Valley in September 2010.

He was treated at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, where he underwent surgery for a ruptured aorta, which was repaired with a large stent-graft, according to the county counsel's office. A little more than a year later, on Oct. 19, 2011, Malone collapsed while playing basketball and was taken to County/USC's emergency room and later admitted.

According to the lawsuit filed the following year, Malone was "screaming in pain" and suffering some loss of sensation in his lower limbs. His condition deteriorated over a two-day period before doctors discovered a clot in his stent that had cut off circulation to his lower body. They performed surgery to repair the stent, but by then it was too late to avoid permanent paralysis.

Malone had also sued Cedars-Sinai, but a court found neither the hospital nor the surgeon there were at fault.

The county has since implemented a "corrective action plan," which included improved transition of care between emergency and in-hospital

services and better communication among the various service providers.

"When there are a lot of people involved, communication doesn't always flow as smoothly as one would like," said Marsha E. Barr-Fernandez, one of Malone's attorneys.

She said the county "really stepped up" in making improvements and in settling the case. It could have cost the county between \$12 million and \$22 million had it lost at trial, Barr-Fernandez said.

Malone, who now lives in Palm Springs, will require care and help with the daily tasks of living for the rest of his life, she said, adding:

"Hopefully, it's a healthy sum that will ease our client's position."

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