

Jury awards couple \$7 million, finding hospital negligent

A Houston jury Friday awarded a Missouri City couple more than \$7 million after finding a hospital's negligence caused the woman's coma.

Catherine and John Wagner sued Fort Bend Community Hospital after lab technicians failed to alert hospital officials that her sodium levels were dangerously low following a bout with the flu and incorrectly reported the test results to her doctor.

The condition, known as hyponatremia, is reversible if treated, but Catherine Wagner went into a coma for 11 days.

"Careless errors by the hospital personnel resulted in Mrs. Wagner suffering serious brain damage," said her attorney, Richard Mithoff. "Her life will never be the same."

Catherine Wagner, 58, can now walk and communicate again, but she has problems speaking and cannot return to her job as an office manager.

The state district court jury awarded the Wagners \$2.5 million in punitive damages, \$3.9 million to Catherine Wagner and \$750,000 to John Wagner.

"Of course we're concerned about the family and don't believe further discussion (about the case) will help them," said a spokeswoman for Columbia, which now owns the hospital.

The jury found no negligence by Maxwell Axler, Catherine Wagner's attending physician named in the suit.