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Dear Harold:

Guess my April's Fools joke is how I spelled April.

Enclosed is a nice picture of the space shuttle going over the Daytona lighthouse. I have spent a lot of time right there. j Most people don't know how close the south end of Daytona is to Cape Kennedy. We used to go out on red snapper boats and fish within sight of the launch gantries at the Cape.

Things have been going okay, except for my typing. The article directly below the picture is one that Betsy consulted on. There was confusion about the medical records. An odd case, not as black and white as it seems.

Met Larry for lunch and was surprised that he was driving, his sports car with a clutch. So I guess he is getting some leg strength back.

Went to Chicago this weekend to see how the other half lives. Betsy's cousin got married and reception was held at a nice country club. Lucky for me, they had a wide screen TV so I could see the UK game.

Productivity in Kentucky has fallen to an all time low. If we don't win the game tonight, life as we know it may cease to exist. Tired and don't have too much to say, except I hope things go well when Lil has her operation. Spoke to a friend who was born with a congenital bad hip. She just had it replaced and says she has never felt better. Young, 42.

I have a bunch of stuff to send Ginocchio, so if he hasn't got it it is because I have not sent it. Thanks for the Hosty disc.

Do have two questions. Have you ever had an exchange of letters with Prof. Schlesinger, and do you know if the JFK library has any books dealing with the Warren Commission? Just wondering

Bill



Blazing across a starry sky



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The space shuttle Atlantis carved a streak across the pre-dawn sky yesterday as it passed over the 110-year-old Ponce Inlet Lighthouse, which is 15 miles south of Daytona Beach, Fla. A leaking steering system jeopardized the length of the mission, but NASA says it won't cut the short the shuttle's docking with the Russian space station Mir. Story, A2

Patient's death put sons, hospital at odds

By PATRICK HOWINGTON
Staff Writer

When Eileen Robards was injured in a car accident as a young woman, doctors gave her penicillin, causing such a violent allergic reaction that she was thrown into a coma for over a week, her sons say.

So when she entered University of Louisville Hospital in 1992 at age 64 for a hernia operation, she told hospital personnel she was allergic to penicillin, her chart shows.

Despite that, Robards was given a penicillin-derived antibiotic after her operation and another drug that can be dangerous to people allergic to penicillin.

Ten days later she was dead, after a downward spiral that puzzled her doctors.

To her sons, William and Ricky King of Louisville, it was not puzzling at all. The penicillin-like drugs, they say, threw her into anaphylactic shock, a violent and life-threatening allergic reaction.

They sued the hospital, and in

December, it paid them \$400,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

The Kings said the hospital's lawyers offered more money if the brothers would agree not to discuss the case publicly. They wouldn't.

Ricky King said he and his brother want people to "be aware that these things go on in hospitals, and policies have to be changed. . . . Because a person died here for no damn reason whatsoever."

U of L Hospital would not comment except to say in a written statement that the decision to settle by the hospital and its then-owner, Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp., was "not an admission of guilt."

The statement said the hospital was not at fault and settled because of the "substantial expense involved in litigation."

Representatives of the Kings and of the hospital disagree on what caused Robards' death, and on the effect of giving her ticarcillin, a



Eileen Robards, allergic to penicillin, was given two drugs that have penicillin warnings. Ten days later she was dead.

See MOTHER'S
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Mother's death angers sons

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penicillin derivative.

But they agree that if she was allergic to penicillin, she should not have been given ticarcillin, also called by its brand name, Timentin.

In its entry for Timentin, the "Physicians' Desk Reference" warns: "SERIOUS AND OCCASIONALLY FATAL HYPERSENSITIVITY (ANAPHYLACTOID) REACTIONS" can occur in people with a history of hypersensitivity to penicillin.

Inside U of L Hospital, possible controls were in place. Robards' wristband was color coded to indicate she was allergic to a medication. Her stated allergy to penicillin was recorded on many of the forms in her hospital chart.

But on some forms, the line for allergies was left blank; on at least one, it was marked "NKA," for "no known allergies," her chart shows.

On Oct. 28, the day Robards' hernia was repaired, the surgeon, Dr. David Lipski, signed an order for her to be given the antibiotic cefoxitin.

Cefoxitin is not in the same family of drugs as penicillin, but some people allergic to penicillin have reactions to it; the PDR warns the drug "should be given with caution to penicillin-sensitive patients."

But in his drug order, Lipski checked the "NKA" box, indicating that Robards had no known allergies, according to Robards' chart.

Lipski, then a resident at U of L Hospital, said yesterday he based that on his taking Robards' history when she was admitted. After talking to her, he wrote that her history included no known drug allergies — evidence that he had asked and she reported none, said Lipski, now a surgery fellow at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

He said he prescribed the antibiotic because Robards had some pneumonia-like symptoms.

Over the next couple of days, her symptoms worsened. She began wheezing and having respiratory distress.

That could have been an allergic reaction to the cefoxitin, said James O'Donnell, an Illinois consultant on pharmacy practice who has taught at several colleges and co-authored a book on pharmacy law and drug injuries; he was hired by the Kings' lawyer to review Robards' case.

On Oct. 31, records show, Lipski prescribed a stronger antibiotic, Ti-



STAFF PHOTO BY PAT HOWINGTON

Ricky King, left, says he and his brother, William, right, want people to "be aware that these things go on in hospitals ..."

mentin, for what he described as a hospital-acquired lung infection.

According to O'Donnell's report, that same morning — shortly after her second dose of Timentin — Robards suffered an allergic anaphylactic reaction to the drug, resulting in severe respiratory arrest.

She was found sitting on the floor, confused, turning blue from lack of oxygen, and short of breath.

Doctors thought she had had a heart attack. Tests eventually ruled that out. Later they diagnosed acute respiratory distress syndrome, then sepsis, a bacterial infection. But whatever they thought was going wrong, they couldn't stop it.

Robards' organs shut down and she died.

Meanwhile, her sons, at the hospital during much of her decline, became angry and verbally abusive to doctors and nurses, according to entries in the medical chart. They threatened to sue, were "physically intimidating" and said threateningly, "You better hope she doesn't die," doctors wrote.

Robards' death certificate said she died of "multisystem organ failure" of unknown origin.

Lipski and Dr. Gregory A. Schmidt, a University of Chicago doctor hired as an expert witness by U of L Hospital, said Robards' decline wasn't caused by receiving Timentin.

In fact, they said, she was already showing symptoms of decline before the drug was prescribed. They said some of the symptoms cited by the Kings and O'Donnell as evidence of anaphylactic shock can also be caused by other problems. Schmidt said sepsis caused her death.

If there is no agreement on what

killed Robards, there is also none on why she was given penicillin-related drugs despite numerous notations in her chart that she was allergic.

Other Louisville hospitals said they have controls to keep patients from getting harmful drugs. Spokesmen for Jewish Hospital, Baptist Hospital East and Alliant Health System's three downtown hospitals said a computer profile of each patient is sent to the hospital pharmacy. If it contains no entry for possible allergies, or shows a patient is allergic to a prescribed drug, the pharmacist calls the prescribing doctor or a nursing station to double-check the order.

U of L Hospital also has such a system, hospital spokesman Ken Marshall said.

To consumer groups and medical watchdogs, what happened to Robards happens too often.

In a study published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association, a Harvard physician estimated that 180,000 people die each year of treatment-related injuries — the equivalent of three jumbo-jet crashes every two days.

The journal article cited other studies that found that medication errors occur in from 2 to 14 percent of patients admitted to hospitals, though most do not result in injury.

"This is not an uncommon occurrence," said Charles Inlander, president of the 125,000-member People's Medical Society, the country's largest consumer-health advocacy group.

Inlander urged patients to watch out for their own welfare, and if they can't, have somebody with them who can. "Whenever they bring you a pill, ask them what that pill is," he said.