IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF OHIO COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

ROBERT W. TAYLOR, Executor of the Estate of **SHARON ANN TAYLOR**, deceased,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action No.: 4-C-225 MJG

BERNICE F. LIM, M.D., JAMES L. COMERCI, M.D., and WHEELING HOSPITAL, INC.,

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

NOW COMES Plaintiff, Robert W. Taylor, Executor of the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor, deceased, by counsel, and for his Complaint against Bernice Lim, M.D., James L. Comerci, M.D., and Wheeling Hospital, Inc., states as follows:

PARTIES AND JURISDICTION

- 1. Plaintiff Robert W. Taylor is and was at all times relevant to the events underlying this Complaint, a citizen and resident of Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, and is the Executor of the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor, deceased.
- 2. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. (hereinafter sometimes referred to as "defendant Lim" or "Lim") is and was at all times relevant to the events underlying this Complaint, a physician practicing medicine in the State of West Virginia at defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc.
- 3. Upon information and belief, Bernice F. Lim, M.D. was at all times relevant to the events underlying this Complaint, a foreign medical student in an organized health care education/training program at Wheeling Hospital working under the supervision of James L. Comerci, M.D.

- 4. Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. (hereinafter sometimes referred to as "defendant Comerci" or "Comerci") is and was at all times relevant to the events underlying this Complaint, a physician practicing medicine in the State of West Virginia at defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., and was, at all times relevant hereto, the head of the Family Medicine Residency Program at Wheeling Hospital, Inc.
- 5. Defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc. is a West Virginia corporation operating a hospital in Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia.
- 6. Defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc. and defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D. had an agency relationship at all times relevant to the events underlying this Complaint, as is set forth in more detail, *supra*;
- 7. Plaintiff's decedent Sharon Ann Taylor was a patient at defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc. from April 25, 2013 through her discharge and transfer to Peterson Rehabilitative Hospital on May 10, 2013.
- 8. Decedent Sharon Ann Taylor was seen by defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D. during Mrs. Taylor's April 25, 2013 admission to Wheeling Hospital, Inc.
- 9. Decedent Sharon Ann Taylor received treatment from defendants Bernice F. Lim,M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D. which treatment form, in part, the basis of plaintiff'sComplaint in this action.
- 10. Jurisdiction and venue are proper in the Circuit Court of Ohio County, West Virginia, as all defendants conduct business in Ohio County, West Virginia, and the acts and/or failures to act giving rise to this action occurred in Ohio County, West Virginia.

OPERATIVE FACTS

- 11. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and Plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
- 12. Sharon Taylor presented to the Wheeling Hospital Emergency Department on April 25, 2013, and was examined and treated by defendant Lim.
- 13. At the April 25, 2013 emergency department presentment, Mrs. Taylor had complaints of intolerable bilateral leg pain and muscle spasm that was rated as a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- **14.** During the April 25, 2013 emergency department visit, Mrs. Taylor complained of stabbing and squeezing pain on her thighs.
- 15. Sharon Taylor's medical/surgical history was incorporated from her previous April 16, 2013 emergency department presentment and included in her Wheeling Hospital electronic medical chart at approximately 3:08 p.m. on April 25, 2013.
- 16. Defendant Lim had available to her decedent Taylor's past medical/surgical history before ordering a CT scan with and without contrast to diagnose plaintiff's decedent's presenting condition.
- 17. Defendant Comerci had available to him decedent Taylor's past medical/surgical history before ordering and/or approving defendant Lim's ordering of a CT scan with and without contrast to diagnose plaintiff's decedent's presenting condition.
- 18. Sharon Taylor's home medication regimen was incorporated from her previous April 16, 2013 emergency department presentment and included in her Wheeling Hospital electronic medical chart at approximately 3:08 p.m. on April 25, 2013.

- 19. Defendant Lim had available to her decedent Taylor's home medication regimen before ordering a CT scan with and without contrast to diagnosis plaintiff's decedent's presenting condition.
- **20.** Defendant Comerci had available to him decedent Taylor's home medication regimen before ordering **and/or** approving defendant Lim's ordering of a CT scan with and without contrast to diagnose plaintiff's decedent's presenting condition.
- 21. Defendant Lim had actual knowledge of decedent Taylor's home medication regimen before ordering a CT scan with and without contrast as she personally reconciled decedent Taylor's medication needs beginning at approximately 3:49 p.m. on April 25, 2013.
- **22.** Defendant Lim ordered Plaintiff's decedent admitted to "inpatient status" at approximately 3:58 p.m. on April 25, 2013.
- **23.** Sharon Taylor was admitted to Wheeling Hospital on April 25, 2013 under Dr. James L. Comerci's attending service.
- **24.** Before the CT scan with and without contrast was ordered, defendants Lim and Comerci were aware that Sharon Taylor, a diabetic patient on insulin and januvia, had among other conditions a history of rheumatoid arthritis, coronary artery disease, and congestive heart failure.
- 25. Before the CT scan with and without contrast was ordered, defendants Lim and Comerci were aware that Sharon Taylor's medical history included a prior acute myocardial infarction, peripheral arterial disease, and a decreased injection fraction of her heart.
- **26.** Prior to ordering the CT scan with and without contrast, Dr. Lim's physical examination of Sharon Taylor did not demonstrate any sign of motor or sensory deficit.

- 27. Prior to ordering and/or approving defendant Lim's ordering of the CT scan with and without contrast, defendant Comerci was aware of defendant Lim's physical examination findings demonstrating a lack of motor or sensory deficits.
- 28. Sharon Taylor's medical condition on April 25, 2013 was not an emergency situation posing an immediate risk to her health or life.
- **29.** Sharon Taylor's medical condition on April 25, 2013 did not necessitate an acute neurosurgical intervention.
- **30.** Sharon Taylor's laboratory work on April 25, 2013 at Wheeling Hospital demonstrated a glomerular filtration rate (GFR) of 57 and a blood urea nitrogen (BUN) of 18.
- 31. Based on her medical history, Sharon Taylor was a VasculoPath with multiple vascular risk factors on April 25, 2013, predisposing her to the risk of renal damage associated with IV contrast medium.
- 32. Dr. Lim and/or Dr. Comerci ordered an urgent CT scan with and without contrast of Sharon Taylor's lumbar spine at 7:00 p.m. on April 25, 2013.
- 33. The Wheeling Hospital electronic medical records indicate that Dr. Comerci ordered an urgent CT scan of Mrs. Taylor's lumbar spine at 7:00 p.m. on April 25, 2013 at the request of defendant Lim.
- 34. The Radiology Report for the April 25, 2013 CT scan of Mrs. Taylor's lumbar spine indicates that defendant Lim ordered the radiological procedure, and that defendant Comerci was Mrs. Taylor's attending physician.
- **35.** Immediately prior to her CT scan with contrast, Sharon Taylor requested prophylactic medicine from the radiology technician to counter the contrast medium, and

explained to the technician that every time she had undergone a CT scan with contrast in the past she was given medicine to counter the effects of the contrast medium.

- **36.** Despite her request of and admonition to the radiology technician, Sharon Taylor received neither pre-test IV fluids, acetylcystine nor was any other protocol utilized to protect and/or spare her kidneys prior to the performance of the CT scan with contrast.
- 37. Upon information and belief, the radiology technician failed to consult with either or both of the prescribing physicians after being told by Sharon Taylor that she needed some type of prophylactic pre-contrast treatment.
- 38. The CT scan with and without contrast was performed at approximately 8:21 p.m. on April 25, 2013, and the report was electronically signed by the radiologist at 1:02 a.m. on April 26, 2013.
- 39. Mrs. Taylor's CT scan of the lumbar spine demonstrated L3-L4 broad disc bulge, L4-L5 disc completely desiccated, with mild anterior listhesis of L4 on L5; severe spinal stenosis due to the combination of the broad calcified disc bulge; L5-S1 disc completely desiccated with loss of disc height; and mild to moderate narrowing of the canal, more focally on the right at L5-S1, was present.
- 40. Sharon Taylor was evaluated by neurosurgeon Dr. David Cohen on April 26, 2013
 who found Sharon Taylor as having normal motor strength with symmetric reflexes.
- 41. After reviewing the CT scan of the lumbar spine without contrast, Dr. Cohen noted that Sharon Taylor's problem was most likely related to degenerative disease, which could be managed with conservative measures as an outpatient, and her condition did not require any neurosurgical emergency procedures.

- **42.** After receiving the lumbar CT scan with IV contrast, Sharon Taylor developed acute renal failure and contrast-induced nephropathy.
- **43.** After developing contrast-induced nephropathy, Sharon Taylor complained to defendant Comerci and others at defendant Wheeling Hospital about the radiology technician's failure to consider her request for prophylactic care before administering the contrast medium.
- 44. Sharon Taylor's medical condition resulting from the contrast-induced nephropathy was complicated over the next two weeks by congestive heart failure, hypercarbia, respiratory acidosis, hypotension, anemia requiring blood transfusion, multifocal hospital acquired pneumonia, bronchospasm, confusion and fluid overload.
- 45. Prior to her development of acute renal failure and contrast-induced nephropathy, Jill Bentfield's evaluation of Mrs. Taylor's condition in her April 26, 2013 Care Management Evaluation anticipated an April 29, 2013 hospital discharge for Sharon Taylor.
- **46.** On May 10, 2013, Sharon Taylor was transferred to Peterson Rehabilitative Hospital in Wheeling with the diagnosis of pneumonia, congestive heart failure, and renal failure.
- 47. On the day of her discharge from Wheeling Hospital, Sharon Taylor was given a letter from Heidi L. Porter, Director of Quality Management at Wheeling Hospital, which references Sharon Taylor's complaints concerning the CT scan with contrast.
- **48.** Following her discharge from Peterson Rehabilitative Hospital, Sharon Taylor fell several times at home and was evaluated at the Ohio Valley Medical Center Emergency Department on June 11, 2013.
- **49.** On June 20, 2013, she was found to be hypoglycemic and unresponsive, and was admitted to Ohio Valley Medical Center.

- **50.** She was noted to have elevated troponins consistent with a non-ST segment elevation myocardial infarction (NSTEMI) and to be in a deconditioned state.
 - 51. She was discharged on June 25, 2013, and passed away on June 29, 2013.
 - 52. Her death certificate indicated the cause of death as Congestive Heart Failure.

COUNT ONE

NEGLIGENCE OF BERNICE F. LIM, M.D.

- 53. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
- **54.** The standard of care required defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. to perform an appropriate assessment of Sharon Taylor's neurologic status.
- 55. The standard of care required defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. to obtain an appropriate neurosurgical consultation of Sharon Taylor before ordering a CT scan of the lumbar spine, particularly a CT scan of the lumbar spine with contrast that was not necessary for diagnostic evaluation, and which did not need to be done on an emergency basis.
- 56. The standard of care required defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. to perform an appropriate assessment of Sharon Taylor's risk factors for contrast-induced nephropathy before embarking on a study that carries significant risk of contrast-induced nephropathy, and particularly before performing a test that did not need to be done on an emergency basis.
- 57. The standard of care required that defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. appropriately inform Sharon Taylor of her heightened risk of developing IV contrast-induced nephropathy based on her medical condition.
 - 58. The standard of care required that defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. appropriately

order for Sharon Taylor, and that Sharon Taylor receive pretreatment to avoid contrast-induced nephropathy such as appropriate IV fluid hydration, and other protocols such as acetylcystine, to avoid contrast-induced nephropathy.

- **59.** Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D., breached the standard of care in relation to her treatment of Sharon Taylor in that she failed to appropriately and timely consult neurosurgery before performing the CT scan of the lumbar spine with contrast.
- 60. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D., breached the standard of care in relation to her treatment of Sharon Taylor in that she failed to adequately inform Sharon Taylor of the significant risk of contrast-induced nephropathy based on her medical condition
- 61. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D., breached the standard of care in relation to her treatment of Sharon Taylor in that she failed to initiate a proper protocol to reduce the risk of contrast-induced nephropathy.
- 62. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D., breached the standard of care in relation to her treatment of Sharon Taylor by obtaining a CT scan of the lumbar spine with contrast that was not indicated based on Sharon Taylor's presentation and physical examination.
- 63. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D. generally deviated from acceptable standards of care for a reasonable prudent physician of ordinary knowledge, care, skill, and diligence under the same or similar conditions and circumstances.
- **64.** Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D.'s care and treatment of Sharon Taylor was negligent and reckless.
- 65. As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment of Sharon Taylor,

Sharon Taylor was placed at a significant risk for contrast-induced nephropathy; and Ms. Taylor languished unnecessarily and developed progressive contrast-induced nephropathy, complicated by congestive heart failure, hypercarbia, respiratory acidosis, hypotension, anemia requiring blood transfusion, multifocal hospital acquired pneumonia, bronchospasm, confusion and fluid overload after her lumbar spine CT scan with IV contrast.

- 66. As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment, Sharon Taylor, prior to her wrongful death, incurred substantial medical expenses for which plaintiff is entitled to recover under W. Va. Code § 55-7-8a.
- 67. As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment, Sharon Taylor, prior to her wrongful death, suffered enormous conscious pain and suffering, including mental and emotional distress for which plaintiff is entitled to recover under W. Va. Code § 55-7-8a.
- As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment, Sharon Taylor developed the aforementioned complications described in paragraph 65 which led to her weakened state, and ultimate death.
- 69. As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment, the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor has suffered the enumerated damages set forth in West Virginia's Wrongful Death Statute at W. Va. Code §§ 55-7-5 and 55-7-6.
 - 70. As a direct and proximate result of defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D's acts and/or

failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of her care and treatment, the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor is entitled to damages under W. Va. Code § 55-7-6 and is entitled to damages for medical bills incurred by Sharon Ann Taylor prior to her death, and for Sharon Ann Taylor's conscious pain and suffering and mental and emotional distress prior to her death.

COUNT TWO

NEGLIGENCE OF JAMES L. COMERCI, M.D.

- 71. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
- 72. The standard of care required defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. to perform an appropriate assessment of Sharon Taylor's neurologic status.
- 73. The standard of care required defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. to obtain an appropriate neurosurgical consultation of Sharon Taylor before ordering a CT scan of the lumbar spine, particularly a CT scan of the lumbar spine with contrast that was not necessary for diagnostic evaluation, and which did not need to be done on an emergency basis.
- 74. The standard of care required defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. to perform an appropriate assessment of Sharon Taylor's risk factors for contrast-induced nephropathy before embarking on a study that carries significant risk of contrast-induced nephropathy, and particularly before performing a test that did not need to be done on an emergency basis.
- 75. The standard of care required that defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. appropriately inform Sharon Taylor of her heightened risk of developing IV contrast-induced nephropathy based on her medical condition.
 - 76. The standard of care required that defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.

appropriately order for Sharon Taylor, and that Sharon Taylor receive pretreatment to avoid contrast-induced nephropathy such as appropriate IV fluid hydration, and other protocols such as acetylcystine to avoid contrast induced nephropathy.

- 77. Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. breached the standard of care in relation to his treatment of Sharon Taylor in that he failed to appropriately and timely consult neurosurgery before ordering the CT scan of lumbar spine with contrast.
- 78. Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. breached the standard of care in relation to his treatment of Sharon Taylor in that he failed to adequately inform Sharon Taylor of the significant risk of contrast-induced nephropathy based on her medical condition.
- 79. Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. breached the standard of care in relation to his treatment of Sharon Taylor in that he failed to initiate a proper protocol to reduce the risk of contrast-induced nephropathy.
- **80.** Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. breached the standard of care in relation to his treatment of Sharon Taylor by obtaining a CT scan of lumbar spine with contrast that was not indicated based on Sharon Taylor's presentation and physical examination.
- **81.** Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. generally deviated from acceptable standards of care for a reasonable prudent physician of ordinary knowledge, care, skill, and diligence under the same or similar conditions and circumstances.
- **82.** Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s care and treatment of Sharon Taylor was negligent and reckless.
- 83. As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment of Sharon

Taylor, Sharon Taylor was placed at a significant risk for contrast-induced nephropathy; and Ms. Taylor languished unnecessarily and developed progressive contrast-induced nephropathy, complicated by congestive heart failure, hypercarbia, respiratory acidosis, hypotension, anemia requiring blood transfusion, multifocal hospital acquired pneumonia, bronchospasm, confusion and fluid overload after her lumbar spine CT scan with IV contrast.

- 84. As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment, Sharon Taylor, prior to her wrongful death, incurred substantial medical expenses for which plaintiff is entitled to recover under W. Va. Code § 55-7-8a
- 85. As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment, Sharon Taylor, prior to her wrongful death, suffered enormous conscious pain and suffering, including mental and emotional distress for which plaintiff is entitled to recover under W. Va. Code § 55-7-8a.
- **86.** As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment, Sharon Taylor developed the aforementioned complications described in paragraph 83 which led to her weakened state, and ultimate death.
- 87. As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment, the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor has suffered the enumerated damages set forth in West Virginia's Wrongful Death Statute at W. Va. Code §§ 55-7-5 and 55-7-6.

88. As a direct and proximate result of defendant James L. Comerci, M.D.'s acts and/or failures to act, and the negligent and reckless nature of his care and treatment, the Estate of Sharon Ann Taylor is entitled to damages under W. Va. Code § 55-7-6 and is entitled to damages for medical bills incurred by Sharon Ann Taylor prior to her death, and for Sharon Ann Taylor's conscious pain and suffering and mental and emotional distress prior to her death.

COUNT THREE

NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION OF JAMES L. COMERCI, M.D.

- **89.** Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and Plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
- **90.** Defendant James L. Comerci, M.D. was, at all times material hereto, the Director of Wheeling Hospital's Family Medicine Residency Program.
- 91. Defendant Bernice F. Lim, M.D., as a foreign medical student in an organized health care education/training program at Wheeling Hospital, was, at all times material hereto, working under the supervision and tutelage of James L. Comerci, M.D.
- 92. Given the foreign medical student/residency status of defendant Lim and the supervisory nature of defendant Comerci's role in her care and treatment of patients in general, and Sharon Ann Taylor in particular, defendant Comerci owed Sharon Ann Taylor a duty of due care in his supervisory role of defendant Lim.
- 93. Defendant Comerci negligently failed to supervisor defendant Lim in her treatment of Sharon Ann Taylor, and as such breached his duty of due care owed to Sharon Ann Taylor in such endeavor.
 - 94. Defendant Comerci is liable for all of the damages caused to plaintiff's decedent

Sharon Ann Taylor resulting from the care and treatment of defendant Lim, prior to her death and for all damages suffered by her Estate, as detailed in Count One of this Complaint as a result of his negligent failure to supervise defendant Lim.

COUNT FOUR

VICARIOUS LIABILITY OF WHEELING HOSPITAL, INC.

- 95. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and Plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
- 96. Defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., as the employer of defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D. is vicariously liable for their acts and/or failures to act and negligence and recklessness, as detailed in Counts One, Two and Three of this Complaint.
- **97.** Defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., as the employer of the unknown radiology technician is vicariously liable for his/her acts and/or failures to act and negligence and recklessness, as detailed in paragraphs 35, 36, 37, 43, and 47 of this Complaint.
- 98. Defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., as the employer of defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D., James L. Comerci, M.D., and the unknown radiology technician is vicariously liable for all of the damages caused to decedent, Sharon Ann Taylor, prior to her death and for all damages suffered by her Estate, as detailed in Counts One, Two and Three of this Complaint.

COUNT FIVE

AGENCY LIABILITY OF WHEELING HOSPITAL, INC.

- **99.** Plaintiff incorporates all allegations above the same as if fully restated and realleged and Plaintiff further complains and says as follows:
 - 100. An agency relationship exists between defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., and

defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D.

101. As an agency relationship exists between defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., and

defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D., defendant Wheeling Hospital,

Inc. is vicariously liable for the acts and/or failures to act of its agents, defendants Bernice F.

Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D.

102. As an agency relationship exists between defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc. and

defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D., defendant Wheeling Hospital,

Inc. is vicariously liable for Dr. Lim's and Dr. Comerci's acts and/or failures to act and

negligence and recklessness, as detailed in Counts One, Two, and Three of this Complaint.

As an agency relationship exists between defendant Wheeling Hospital, Inc., and 103.

defendants Bernice F. Lim, M.D. and James L. Comerci, M.D., defendant Wheeling Hospital,

Inc. is vicariously liable for all of the damages caused to decedent, Sharon Ann Taylor, prior to

her death and for all damages suffered by her Estate, as detailed in Counts One, Two, and Three

of this Complaint.

WHEREFORE, plaintiff demands compensatory damages from defendants, jointly and/or

severally where appropriate, in an amount to be determined by the trier of fact. Plaintiff further

demands prejudgment and post-judgment interest, as well as such other relief as a judge or jury

shall find fair and just.

PLAINTIFF DEMANDS A TRAIL BY JURY UPON ALL ISSUES TRIABLE BY A

JURY RAISED HEREIN.

Dated: August , 2014.

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ROBERT W. TAYLOR, Executor of the Estate of SHARON ANN TAYLOR, deceased, Plaintiff

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