

# Court holds center liable in patient's death

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ALBANY — Staff members at Buffalo Psychiatric Center allowed a patient's bedsore to fester for weeks before gangrene and other complications killed the 71-year-old woman in 1989, the State Court of Claims ruled this week.

Judge Thomas McMahon ruled that the state was negligent and completely responsible for the "agonizing" death of Sarah Rose Jackson. McMahon said he will schedule a trial to determine how much is owed to her heirs.

In his decision, McMahon quoted funeral director Hubey Meadows as saying:

"In more than 30 years as a funeral director, I have never seen a body coming from a hospital in the condition in which I found Sarah Rose Jackson."

A Spokeswoman for the center said she

could not comment on the case since the court action is continuing.

Mrs. Jackson had a history of mental illness and was admitted to the Psychiatric Center several times between 1955 and her last admission in 1984. At that time, she weighed 140 pounds but dropped to 124 pounds within a year and 99 pounds shortly before her death.

The court and state officials found that actions to maintain her weight were not carried out until she had seriously deteriorated. Bedsores on her buttocks and feet were treated, but not as aggressively as they could have been, according to the court, as well as the state Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled.

The commission's investigation found that, contrary to the staff's claim, emergency care was available at Erie County Medical Center. But even before that, nurses did not recognize the early stages of the patient's bedsores or

adequately alert doctors for more-significant treatment, the court found.

Doctors also were found negligent, but state mental health officials have decided not to pursue disciplinary charges against any of the center's staff.

The Psychiatric Center's review board also "concluded the care was inadequate."

McMahon called that a "masterpiece of understatement."

The Commission on Quality of Care had a harsher assessment and is currently reviewing the hospital's plan for preventing similar incidents.

A doctor testifying for Mrs. Jackson's family said that the bedsore on her buttocks eventually carved a cavity in one leg down to the knee.

"Such negligent care caused the death of Sarah Jackson as well as the intense suffering which in my opinion preceded her death," said Dr. J. Arthur Torian.