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Parents ask \$10M for daughter

By Kay Stephens
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HOLLIDAYSBURG — Parents of an 11-year-old Altoona girl are asking a Blair County jury to award them \$10 million to cover the lifetime care she'll need because they say doctors were too slow to diagnose and treat the disease that left her a quadriplegic.

John and Edith Frederick are suing Altoona Hospital, three local pediatricians, Geisinger

Medical Center of Danville and eight of its doctors in the Blair County Court of Common Pleas. The parents claim a failure to make an early diagnosis of tuberculosis meningitis and initiate the care so she could recover.

Tuberculosis meningitis is an inflammation of the fluid surrounding the spinal cord and brain lining.

The civil case began Wednesday with opening statements before visiting Judge Ellis Van Horn and is expected to last

about six weeks.

In asking for the \$10 million judgment, attorney Michael Kessler of Albany, N.Y., representing the Fredericks, asked the jury to consider the full-time care that a quadriplegic needs. He estimated them at \$150,000 annually in an adult institution.

"She can't use her arms or her legs. She can't walk or run. She must wear diapers," Kessler told the jury.

He also told the jury to consider that the child, who has some mental

acuity that allows her to attend school, will never have a full life.

"Her after-school activity is therapy, to learn to pick up a stick or use a switch. She'll never be able to speak to anyone except by computer," he said.

Attorney Giles Gaca of Pittsburgh, representing pediatricians Rodney Sponsler, David Galbraith and John Berardinelli, denies the charges. He said the most important factor in making a diagnosis of this case is knowing that the youngster had been exposed to someone

else with tuberculosis. The girl was tested for tuberculosis while at the Altoona Hospital and the test came back negative.

But Gaca said that it wasn't until after Geisinger doctors diagnosed Stacy that an aunt recalled a St. Mary's School janitor having had tuberculosis. Stacy often went to St. Mary's with her mother who was a school volunteer.

Attorney John McIntyre of Altoona Hospital told the jury doctors had nothing to confirm that the child had tuberculosis.