

New Haven Register

Jury awards \$12 million to estate of Madison man who took his life after being released from hospital

By [Juliemar Ortiz](#)

NEW HAVEN >> A Superior Court jury has awarded more than \$12 million to the estate of Alan E. Jarecki of Madison, who allegedly was not properly treated at Yale-New Haven Hospital and by a psychiatric nurse at Harbor Health Services Inc. prior to his committing suicide.

The exact amount that will be paid to the estate, however, is unknown, as the hospital “resolved” the case prior to the trial.

“Yale-New Haven Hospital had resolved any disputes with the Jarecki Estate prior to trial and as such did not participate at the trial,” Y-NH spokesman Mark D’Antonio said in a statement.

But attorney Josh Koskoff, who represented the Jarecki estate, said the verdict shows that the community will no longer put up with poor standards of mental health care.

“I think it’s a wake-up call to the health care community that we now expect mental care to be delivered with quality to all people. It doesn’t rise and fall on a particular patient’s financial situation,” Koskoff said.

According to the lawsuit, Jarecki, who was 55 at the time of his death, was admitted to Yale-New Haven Hospital for 10 days in July 2009 and the hospital decided to taper off his anxiety medication, which he had been taking for about 10 years. He was discharged to Harbor Health Services under the care of a psychiatric advanced-practice registered nurse, Catherine M. Florio, the suit claims. Harbor Health Services could not be reached for comment.

According to court documents, Florio saw him once and told him to come back in three months. Nine days later, Jarecki, who was still off his medication, called his mother, drove to Bauer Park in Madison and took his own life.

At the time of his death, Jarecki, a former house painter, recently had been diagnosed with a chronic illness, and was unemployed and coming off a 10-year dependence on the medication, Koskoff said.

After the three-week trial before Judge Salvatore Agati, the jury deliberated for three hours and concluded that Yale-New Haven Hospital was 65 percent at fault for Jarecki's death and Florio was 35 percent at fault. A source also said the hospital settled its part of the case in advance of the trial.

"The jury found that they discharged him too prematurely because he was in the middle of withdrawal of the medication that he had become dependent on," Koskoff said. "They (the jury) felt that turning him out into the community, even to a health care center, that probably shouldn't have been done when they did."

Koskoff said Jarecki got second-class treatment. The lawsuit against Florio, filed April 21, said the nurse "failed to adequately and properly care for, treat, diagnose, monitor and/or supervise (Jarecki) for anxiety, depression, benzodiazepine taper and/or suicidality" and failed to take a thorough history and to properly assess him for physiological signs and symptoms of benzodiazepine withdrawal. The complaint also states that she did not "facilitate getting Alan E. Jarecki into a Harbor Health intensive outpatient program."

Attorney Katie Mesner-Hage, who also was representing Jarecki's estate, said although there is a stigma associated with mental illness, with some people too ashamed to ask for help, Jarecki was not one of those people, thus his death could have been avoided.

"Part of what makes this case so tragic and so preventable is that he was not afraid to speak out and that he reached out for help again and again," Mesner-Hage said.