

Jury hits GPRMC with \$625K ruling

Hospital plans to appeal breach of contract ruling

Dale Denwalt

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A jury has ordered Elk City's hospital to pay a Michigan family more than half a million dollars for breach of contract.

According to court documents, Great Plains Regional Medical Center owes \$550,000 in actual damages and another \$75,000 in punitive damages for failing to pay a signing bonus and life insurance policy to the family of Dr. Pravin Aneja, who died in 2008 just two days after he started work there.



"We think that the jury in Beckham County did what was right," said Shannon Wheeler, an Tulsa attorney representing the plaintiffs.

The suit was filed on behalf of Raji Aneja, wife of the deceased. A Beckham County jury handed down the verdict earlier this month.

The Aneja family claimed that the hospital had agreed to pay Dr. Aneja a \$40,000 signing bonus on the first day he saw patients. His contract also stated that the hospital was to purchase a life insurance policy in the amount of his base salary of \$350,000.

Court documents suggest that Great Plains first gave the signing bonus check to Aneja but cancelled it when they learned he had died.

"On that very same day, the hospital put a stop payment on the signing bonus check," said Wheeler.

The family asked for an additional \$10,000 because they claimed that when the hospital's then-CEO Robin Lake showed Aneja's wife a copy of the employment contract, it misleadingly did not include the benefits section.

In its response to the lawsuit, the hospital rejected Aneja's claims. The filing states that the contract was not enforceable because the doctor "made false statements" and tried to conceal "his medical condition."

The hospital's response to the lawsuit later mentions Dr. Aneja's "unclean hands with regard to his false statements."

GPRMC also denied the claim that Lake failed to present Aneja's wife with a copy of the benefits section of her husband's contract.

When contacted about this case, current Great Plains CEO Don Ikner said the issue is not resolved, and not finalized.

"At this point, you will see an appeal on this case," he said.

The plaintiff can request a bond be fronted by the hospital to secure the award during the appeals process.

Wheeler's firm will also be seeking attorney's fees in the case.