A Yale Tale

Doc-to-be sues an Ivy League for HIV

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Last winter, Yale University shelled out $12.2 million for a prick. A needle prick, that is. In a case presented to a Connecticut state jury, “Jane Doe” said she was infected with HIV at Yale Med School in ’88, while performing a procedure for which she was not trained or supervised. Seven weeks into her internship at Yale New Haven Hospital, the 25-year-old doc-to-be pricked her thumb after being ordered to insert a catheter into a PWA’s artery. In court testimony, a nurse recalled the moment Doe stuck it to herself: “All she said was, ’There goes my life.’” Six weeks later, the intern tested positive for HIV.

According to the AP, the Ivy Leaguer lit into Yale for a cool $21 million for future medical bills, loss of income, pain and “the loss of her ability to enjoy life and the inevitable loss of her life itself.” Yale’s lawyer argued that the university should not be held responsible. After a three-hour deliberation, the jurors awarded her the lower figure. Doe, now 35, said she is practicing a medical specialty different from the one she would have otherwise chosen, so as not to put patients at risk.

The CDC estimates at least 5,000 annual needlestick exposures to HIV, but has documented only one case of doc-to-patient HIV transmission over the last decade, while 52 health care workers have gotten HIV on the job.

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