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## Paraplegic Accepts \$7M in Suit Over Failure To Detect Tumor

**H**otalen *v. Radiologic Associates of Northern New Jersey*: Four doctors accused of failing to detect a spinal tumor in a teenager who became a paraplegic will pay \$7.7 million, under a settlement reached Tuesday in Morris County.

In 2001, Cindy Hotalen, of Sussex, complained of numbness in her leg and had an MRI but the radiologist failed to read it properly, according to the plaintiff's lawyers, Jeff Korek and Michael Fruhling of Gersowitz Libo & Korek in Englewood. Not until 2003, when another MRI was ordered, did doctors realize she had a tumor that had grown to six centimeters long.

Between the two MRIs, she complained of numbness to her orthopedist, neurosurgeon and neurologist. Korek says Hotalen, now 23, would have had a 90-to-95-percent chance of avoiding paralysis had surgery been timely.

Korek gave this settlement breakdown: MRI radiological analyst Matthew Skalla of Newton, represented by Louis John Dughi of Dughi & Hewit in Cranford, \$5 million; orthopedist David Basch of Sparta, represented by Peter Korn of McDonough, Korn, Eichhorn & Schorr in Springfield, \$1.4 million; neurosurgeon Allan Gardner of Morristown, represented by Michael Ricciardulli of Ruprecht, Hart & Weeks in Millburn, \$550,000; and neurologist Infanta Stephen of Dover, represented by James Sharp of Sharp & Brown in Parsippany, \$750,000.

The defense attorneys did not return calls. Korek says the radiologist did not submit an expert report and the other doctors said a misread MRI was to blame.

— By Henry Gottlieb