

Family reuniting with \$7.6M award

Kin plans to use payout in man's death to bring daughter home from state hospital

BY CLARE TRAPASSO
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THE WIFE of a Flushing man who died after a Queens hospital forgot to remove his inflamed gallbladder — twice — said she hopes to use a \$7.6 million court award to reunite her family.

The widow of Korean immigrant Nam Lee, who died at the age of 60 in 2008 at New York Hospital Queens, in Flushing, plans to use the money to bring her mentally ill daughter home from a state institution.

A lawyer for the hospital said he will appeal the award later this month.

Jae Yon Lee, 32, has lived in state hospitals and group homes since the death of her father, who was her primary caregiver. Nam Lee's job as a salesman allowed him to bring his daughter to work with him every day.

"I first thank God for the justice that was served," widow Young Sook Lee, 59, who works full time, said through a translator.

Nam Lee's son Hyung Ki Lee, 35, of Fresh Meadows, said the money will enable his family to afford around-the-clock care for his sister, who also has epilepsy.



Widow Young Sook Lee and son, Hyung Ki Lee, said they will use \$7.6M judgement in death of Nam Lee, who died at New York Hospital Queens, to reunite the family. Photo by Christie M. Farriella

"After [my dad] passed away, my sister was very confused," he said. "It was devastating."

His father was admitted to the hospital on June 18, 2008, for gallstones, the family's lawyer Judith Livingston said. Nam Lee's gallbladder was scheduled to be removed

the following day.

But the next day, Nam Lee's name wasn't on the surgical schedule, she said. And the same thing happened the day after that.

By the time the hospital was ready to operate, Nam Lee was too sick, Livingston said.

Four days after Nam Lee was admitted to New York Hospital Queens, he was dead.

"Nobody in the United States of America should die of a gallstone when they get to the hospital in plenty of time," she said.

A Queens Supreme Court jury decided on Dec. 23 to award the Lee family the money.

Attorney Shawn Kelly, who represents the hospital, said the hospital admitted an error had occurred in Nam Lee's treatment. But he plans to file an appeal in mid-January.

"The verdict was grossly excessive based on sympathy," he said. "The jurors were overwhelmed with sympathy for the family and the daughter. That's what happens on Christmas Eve."

Kelly said he is confident the award will be reduced.

Hyung Ki Lee said he and his mother are depending on that money to bring his sister home.

"The figure represented what my dad went through — what we went through," he said.

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