

Man gets \$776K in medical lawsuit

Wife's liver damaged by surgical staples

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Journal staff

Don McLaren summed up his feelings succinctly Friday, a day after a jury awarded him \$776,000 in a medical malpractice lawsuit against Rapid City surgeon Wesley Sufficool.

"Relief — just relief," he said.

"It's off my shoulders now," the 72-year-old Interior man said in a telephone interview after spending a week in Rapid City for the trial that began Monday and ended with the jury's decision Thursday evening after three hours of deliberations.

» From A1

Malpractice

McLaren sat alone through the trial and returned to an empty house. He had no one to celebrate the victory with after his wife of 15 years, Karla McLaren, died in August at the age of 55.

Karla McLaren initiated the lawsuit against Sufficool after she was diagnosed with end-stage liver disease in 2011.

"She said 'don't let it slip,' and I told her I would finish it," McLaren said. "She was a great lady."

Karla McLaren spent the last months of her life in a nursing home after being diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, but her health started to deteriorate several months after Sufficool removed her gallbladder in December 2010.

Karla McLaren was severely jaundiced from lack of liver function and in a great deal of pain when she was hospitalized in May 2011. It was then that doctors discovered the surgical staples preventing the flow of bile from her liver into her digestive system, McLaren's attorney James Leach of Rapid City said.

"She suffered a great deal. She was living with a death sentence."

James Leach, attorney



Courtesy photo

Karla and Don McLaren of Interior on their wedding day in 1998. A jury awarded Don McLaren \$776,000 on Thursday at the conclusion of a medical malpractice suit. His late wife initiated the lawsuit against Dr. Wesley Sufficool in 2011, after learning she had end-stage liver disease.