

My name is Levern Dostal, and I came here today to tell you about my wife, Helen, who died as a result of medical negligence.

Helen was hospitalized at Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids on August 13, 1996. She was scheduled for routine gallbladder surgery on August 13, 1996. We were told to expect a brief recovery in the hospital before she could come home and resume her normal activities.

Because of her known risk factors, Helen should have received antibiotics before her surgery. Despite these known risks, Helen never received any antibiotics. After her surgery, she developed flesh-eating bacteria and gas gangrene. Helen had three radical surgeries on her right flank and abdomen, resulting in the loss of 20% of her total skin surface area. During one of these surgeries, a large section of mesh was stitched into her abdomen to prevent her intestines from spilling out.

Helen received massive amounts of antibiotics and morphine during her hospitalization. Her vital organs eventually shut down, and she died on September 9, 1996.

A jury in Linn County heard evidence from both sides and found that my wife's surgeon was negligent, and that his negligence had caused her death. Damages were awarded and the judgment was paid. This is the way our system is supposed to work. During the trial, nurses who took care of my wife in the intensive care unit broke down in tears at the memory of her condition, and said it was the worst thing they had seen in all their years of nursing.

Holding doctors and hospitals accountable for their negligent conduct shouldn't be a political issue. Preventable medical errors kill thousands of people every year. Some of them are Democrats ... some of them are Republicans ... and some of them are Independents.

All I know is that when it happens to someone you love, you don't want excuses. You don't want sympathy. All you want is the peace of mind to know that the problem has been fixed and no one else will ever have to go through what Helen went through.

Thank you.