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Orthopedic Surgery Sample Case

Hip replacement operation for aseptic necrosis (gangrene of the hip joint) which became infected requiring more surgery.

This patient was incapacitated from her worsening hip pain. The x-ray studies revealed "aseptic necrosis," which is gangrene of the ball joint of the femur (thigh bone). It can be caused by steroid medications, alcohol and other medical conditions. I have not seen any indication of her previous medical care other than a few months of steroid injections of unknown dosage because of her hip pains.

She was fully informed as to the risks, and the operation was performed in the standard manner per the detailed operative report on 12/26 by Dr. #1. What is missing is whether or not she received prophylactic (preventative) antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection. The failure to give antibiotics immediately prior to and after the operation is negligence.

To give you that answer, I would need to see the missing pre- and postoperative Doctor's orders, the anesthesia records, Operating Room and Recovery Room Nurses' notes and the medication administration record.

She had a low grade fever postoperatively for a few days; that is not uncommon. Otherwise, she seemed to do well.

On 1/21, Dr. #1 noted signs of infection and obtained a sample of the joint fluid for infection. Germs were present (coagulase-negative Staphylococcus). Antibiotics did not cure this infection, so on 2/20, he removed the infected prosthesis from the pelvic side of the hip area, washed out (irrigated) the hip joint and inserted antibiotics with cement, the standard of care.

Then on 5/15, he reoperated to reinsert the pelvic side of the prosthesis. All of this is standard, good care.

Her thrombophlebitis (clotting in leg veins) was properly treated with the anticoagulant (blood thinner) Coumadin. Again, good care.

She had a probable allergic (hypersensitivity reaction) to one of her antibiotics, and it was discontinued on 3/25. She received proper care for that unfortunate drug reaction.

The infection caused the loosening, a common complication. There was no over medication.

My only concern was whether or not she received prophylactic (preventative) antibiotics at the time of her 12/26 operation by Dr. #1. If she did not receive them, there would be negligence by Dr. #1. I need to see just those missing records I noted above.