

Surgery on brain of boy ill-advised, specialist testifies Drugs controlled seizures, he says

BY ANDY DAVIS ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

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A surgery that was performed on the wrong side of a boy's brain didn't help his seizure problem and appears to have hurt his mental functioning, a neurologist testified Wednesday.

Dr. Samuel Boellner's testimony came during the second week of a malpractice lawsuit filed by the family of Cody Metheny of Little Rock over the Aug. 2, 2004, surgery at Arkansas Children's Hospital to remove a lesion from the right side of Metheny's brain to stop him from having seizures. Metheny was 15 at the time.

Dr. Badih Adada removed the lesion but only after mistakenly operating on the left side of Metheny's brain.

Boellner, a Little Rock neurologist who took over Metheny's care in December 2005, questioned why Metheny had surgery at all. He said Metheny's seizures had been controlled by medication.

"You don't operate on those patients," Boellner said.

Boellner said the operation removed portions of the amygdala and hippocampus on each side of Metheny's brain, leaving him with a diminished ability to make decisions.

The problem is more severe when it affects both sides, because if only one side was damaged, the other side would be able to compensate, Boellner said.

That is why doctors generally haven't performed such bilateral surgeries since the 1950s, Boellner said.

"I don't think you could find a neurosurgeon who would recommend it - a competent neurosurgeon," Boellner said.

Boellner also said the surgery left Metheny "flat" emotionally and that he has continued to have seizures since the operation, although he has a different type of seizure now than before.

But Carol Bland, one of Metheny's special-education teachers at Parkview High School, testifying for the defense, said Metheny showed improvement in his academic performance and behavior after the surgery.

"There was just significant gain in all areas," Bland said.

A reporter and photographer with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette were in the operating room at the beginning of the surgery, and the operation was detailed in a front-page story three weeks later.

The reporter, Nell Smith, who now works for the Bureau of Legislative Research, and photographer Steve Keesee, had been scheduled to testify Wednesday. Just after Keesee took the stand, however, the attorneys decided his testimony was unnecessary and stipulated that Smith and Keesee would have simply acknowledged what was published in the newspaper.

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