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11-29-19

To: Geri Luebeck, Patient Relations, Providence St. John

Dear Ms. Luebeck,

The time has come to address what happened to my dad, Nathan [REDACTED], under the care of Dr. Anton Bilchik in your hospital.

Although his surgery took place November 1st of 2017, he took 7 more months after to wither away and die on May 21, 2018. And, especially because of the nature of his illness and the subsequent care (of lack thereof), I have been in mourning and unable to address this issue until now.

In the month preceding my dad's surgery we took precaution in choosing an expert for this procedure, the "Whipple." My dad, although elderly, was a prime candidate, a fact not only confirmed by doctors at your facility but by a true expert in the procedure, Dr. Yuman Fong at City of Hope.

We chose Dr. Anton Bilchik because he was presented by Dr. Rudy Bedford and others at your facility as a top expert. Upon reading online reviews his reputation was presented as stellar, the top 1% to be exact. Also, my dad preferred to have his operation performed close to home.

After the operation the first the first thing I found distressing is Dr. Bilchik, (although I had informed him) did not seem to have any interest in making sure my dad received his anxiety medication, which led to a state of depression requiring consultation with the hospital's and his own psychiatrist.

Next, Dr. Bilchik sent my dad home after a 12 day stay, claiming he was doing great. But within a couple days my dad became extremely dehydrated and could hardly eat. And, although he ordered in-home IV for 7 days, Dr. Bilchik showed no concerns. Even when my dad visited a week later and Dr. Bilchik saw the state my dad was in (he had lost about 25lb within the 1st month), Dr. Bilchik sent him home merely saying he had to eat more.

I reached out to Dr. Bilchik many more times throughout the next few months as we were desperately trying to figure out what was going wrong with my dad but Dr. Bilchik always had an excuse and said my dad was doing fine.

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Dr. Morris Grabie ran some tests but did not return calls when we asked for results. He sent my dad to see a gastroenterologist, who also did not address what was wrong or why my dad kept on losing weight and deteriorating.

No one spoke to us, no one addressed anything and the consensus was my dad was suffering from UTI's and this was causing the problem. However the urologist we consulted, Dr. Peter Loisides, did not concur with this. In fact, Dr. Loisides said my dad was not infected and that he thought there was "something else" wrong with him. However, Dr. Bilchik kept insisting that my dad was fine.

Finally, in April of 2018 my dad was in excruciating pain and was taken to your emergency room where it was determined he had "Failure to Thrive" and later diagnosed as also having Pancreatitis. Again, Dr. Bilchik came down to see him and said he will be fine when we get the supposed urological problem resolved.

Dad was re-admitted to your facility on April 30th, 2018. But, because Dr. Bilchik had no solutions and I believed Dr. Bilchik's view that my dad just needed time to recuperate, I suggested we send my dad to California Rehabilitation Institute, where he could finally recover like Dr. Bilchik kept telling us he would.

Dr. Bedford stuck a PICC-line in him and off he went.

Within 24 hours of being at the rehabilitation center, he swelled up like a balloon. Dr. Shelley Schwartz, the rehab doctor, was dumbfounded my dad was sent to her as he was in no condition to be there, she said. She called Dr. Bilchik but he had his recently new Fellow, who knew nothing about the case, call her back. She had no records to work with to treat my father.

Dr. Schwartz asked if she could transfer my dad to her UCLA team at Cedars Sinai and I agreed.

At Cedars Sinai, my dad was put under the care of Dr. Srinivas Gaddam, a gastroenterologist. Dr. Gaddam conducted a robotic camera inspection of the surgery site, (double balloon enteroscopy), and determined my dad suffered from Afferent Limb Syndrome. He spent 3 hours with the camera, which revealed that the intestine used to rebuild the bile duct was too long, angulated, and "pretzel-like." He took 29 pictures. His conclusion: It was too late, there was no hope, my dad was dying.

I confronted Dr. Grabie in person on December 13th, 2018. He acknowledged that tests that had been taken while in the care of St. John's showed my dad's stomach was extended. He also admitted your staff knew he was dying but didn't know why.

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Dr. Bilchik, when confronted in a phone conversation on December 3rd, 2018, stated that he doubted my dad had Afferent Limb Syndrome, but even if he had, the intestine is loopy, and that this isn't the first time this happened to one of his patients. In fact, he said it happened a few times. This comment was very disturbing given the rarity of this mechanical complication, usually 1% of patients according to Medscape.

My dad passed away on May 21, 2018. According to Dr. Gaddam, the likely cause of his deterioration, malnutrition, sepsis, and ultimate demise was Afferent Limb Syndrome. And, after doing my own extensive reading, all the symptoms which seem to have stumped your doctors suddenly all seemed to make sense to me.

Not only did no one reach out to me (they all knew because Dr. Paymen Vahedifar treated my dad at Cedars and was in contact with Dr. Grabie), but Dr. Grabie was openly and aggressively yelling at the UCLA team for taking his patient. I know this from Dr. Vahedifar and also Dr. Grabie himself.

My dad was a dedicated patient of several doctors of your facility and he spent thousands of dollars out of pocket to be in your Caritas ward. We believe we deserve answers to the multitude of questions we have. I would like to set up a meeting with appropriate hospital personnel to address these issues.

Our family is looking for closure for this matter. We also have concerns that the level of care my father received, including from the surgeon, was below the standards of this hospital. In particular, we believe that errors were made and instead of addressing them head-on, they were hidden from us, which ultimately led to my father's passing.

So, as you can see by this recount, we need the above history addressed. Thank you in advance for replying to this letter promptly.

Sincerely,

Nadia [REDACTED]

Cc: Michael Ricks, CEO
Jim Fordyce, Board Chair

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