

Dentist, aide go on trial in choking

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AKRON — Opening statements are to begin today in the wrongful death case of an Akron man who died after choking on gauze he was given at his dentist's office.

Steven Kawczk, 41, died in May 1994 following oral surgery at a dentist's office on Fortuna Dr. in Green.

His wife, Sandra Kawczk, is suing the dentist, Dr. John Santin, and his dental assistant, Lori McCauley, on behalf of their three children.

Timothy Scanlon, an attorney for the family, said Steven Kawczk was unconscious and under general anesthetic when he choked. The gauze had been placed in his throat to control excessive bleeding.

The gauze, the suit says, blocked Kawczk's airway, making it impossible for him to breathe properly. Scanlon said Kawczk began to struggle and thrash about five minutes after the throat gauze was placed in his mouth.

The suit also contends that paramedics were not called for more than an hour.

"All that time Dr. Santin knew his patient was not breathing properly," the suit said. "When he could not even see the missing throat drape in his patient's trachea, much less retrieve it, he should have immediately summoned the paramedics."

McCauley, who was to monitor the computer readings that show a patient's pulse rate, blood pressure, oxygen and temperature, noticed an increase in blood pressure readings and an irregular breathing patterns between 9:45 a.m. and 10 a.m., the suit said.

McCauley then questioned Santin about the gauze, asking whether he had removed it. McCauley said she and the dentist looked inside of Steven Kawczk's mouth a total of six times but failed to find the gauze, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit also complains that Santin refused a request by the ambulance drivers to accompany his patient to Akron City Hospi-

"Because of a lack of information about what happened to Steven Kawczk in Dr. Santin's office, there was some confusion in the hospital emergency room when Kawczk arrived," Scanlon said in court papers. "Precious time was lost."

Defense attorney Richard Rymond said there was no evidence Santin intended to harm his patient.

"There is no evidence whatsoever that defendants deliberately or intentionally injured plaintiff nor any evidence they failed to exercise care," Rymond said.

McCauley's attorney, Beth Sebaugh, said her client denied that she was negligent.

The suit seeks nearly \$9 million in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages. The case is being tried by a jury in the courtroom of Common Pleas Judge James Williams.