

Former USC Rowing Champion Sues Doctor, Alleging Botched Surgery

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Dionne Licudine is not 25; her routine surgery to remove her gall bladder in 2012 was allegedly botched.

By [Mirna Alfonso \(Patch Staff\)](#) May 26, 2015



Photo, screenshot from Trojan website

By BILL HETHERMAN

City News Service

LOS ANGELES (CNS) - The head coach of the USC women's rowing team testified Tuesday that a former Women of Troy coxswain who suffered a near-life-threatening injury while on the operating table in 2012 staged a dramatic comeback a month later in leading her team to victory during competition in San Diego.

Zenon Babraj, 60, told a Los Angeles Superior Court jury that only weeks before the San Diego Crew

Classic in March 2012, he saw Dionne Licudine in a different light as she recovered from mistakes allegedly made by a resident physician during normally routine surgery to remove her gall bladder.

Licudine, now 25, sued Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Dr. Ankur Gupta in January 2013. Trial of her medical malpractice lawsuit is in its second week.

According to the plaintiff's court papers, Gupta damaged a blood vessel while inserting an instrument called a trocar into Licudine's abdomen so that the body cavity could be viewed with the help of a camera attached. Gupta was performing the surgery along with Dr. Brendan Carroll, who is no longer a defendant.

The alleged error required vascular surgery by another physician to save Licudine's life, according to her lawsuit. She was left with a 6-inch scar extending from her navel to her breastbone, causing severe emotional distress to a young woman who often wore two-piece bathing suits for rowing activities or during recreation, according to her lawsuit.

Babraj said Licudine was hooked up to medical devices and was unable to communicate with him.

"If she would be my daughter, I would cry all day," said Babraj, a Polish immigrant. "A few weeks (before surgery) she was screaming and leading the team. It was very hard to see someone so devastated."

Babraj said that when Licudine returned to the rowing team, he worried that she could impair her health if she resumed her role of steering and navigating boats as the team's coxswain. But her teammates made it clear who they wanted at the helm, he said.

"We're not rowing if she's not in the boat," the other USC rowers said, according to Babraj.

Licudine struggled at first, but built up her strength and helped lead her team to top honors, the Jessop-Whittier Cup, for the second straight year during the San Diego competition, Babraj said.

Babraj said members of the USC rowing team typically are also top scholars. He said one former member recently graduated from law school, and that Licudine was offered free tuition as a graduate assistant coach. However, her health prevented her from taking the position, Babraj said.

Babraj said Licudine's advice as an assistant coach would have been valuable because after she graduated, the rowing team was "struggling in the coxswain area."

Licudine was nominated as USC's female Trojan athlete of the year in 2012.

Attorney: Former USC Coxswain Deserves \$1 Million For Botched Surgery

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In his final argument to a Los Angeles Superior Court panel, Howard Kapp said Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Dr. Ankur Gupta are liable.

By [Mirna Alfonso \(Patch Staff\)](#) June 1, 2015

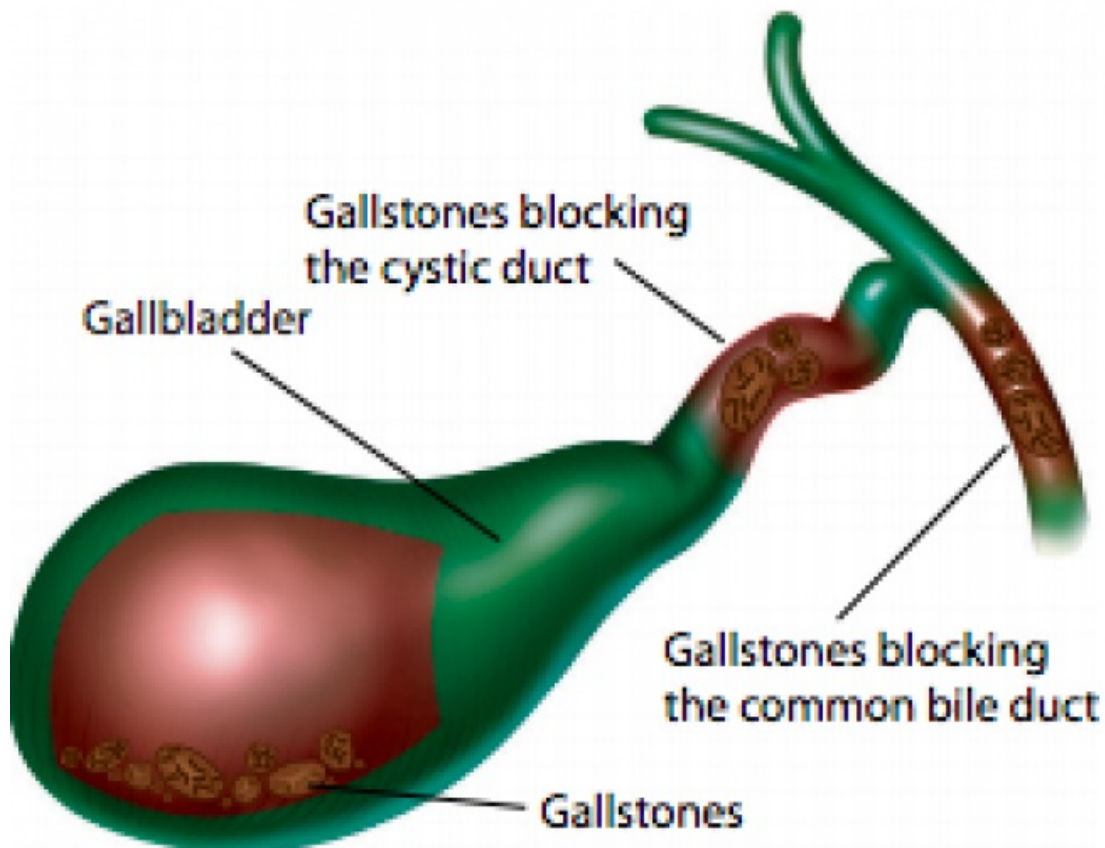


Photo screenshot from The [American College of Surgeons website](#)

By BILL HETHERMAN

City News Service

LOS ANGELES (CNS) - A former coxswain for the USC women's rowing team suffered a near-life-threatening injury during normally routine surgery and should be awarded more than \$1.3 million for medical malpractice, her lawyer told a jury Monday, but a defense attorney blamed the plaintiff's medical complications on the inherent risks of the procedure.

In his final argument to a Los Angeles Superior Court panel, lawyer Howard Kapp said Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Dr. Ankur Gupta should be found negligent for the injuries suffered by Dionne Licudine.

He said Gupta made mistakes that caused Licudine to suffer adhesions causing bowel obstructions as well as a visible scar. Gupta and another physician performed gall bladder removal surgery on Licudine in February 2012.

Kapp displayed for jurors a photo of Licudine strapped to machines in her hospital bed and another image displaying her scar. He said that despite the medical setback, Licudine rejoined her teammates a month later as they rowed to victory in the San Diego Crew Classic.

“This is one of those things that TV movies are made of,” Kapp said. “It’s about a girl at death’s door who was the leader of her team that won the race.”

But defense attorney Raymond Moore said Kapp’s damages estimate was “speculative.” He also said Gupta was not negligent and used sound medical judgment in inserting an instrument called a trocar into Licudine’s abdomen so that her body cavity could be viewed with the help of a camera attached.

“But that does come at the price of increasing the risks of striking organs because you can’t see them,” Moore said.

Moore said that if the jury does decide negligence occurred, Licudine should be compensated by no more than \$75,000 to \$100,000 for her hospital stay and her scarring.

Gupta performed the surgery along with Dr. Brendan Carroll, who is no longer a defendant.

Kapp maintains Gupta damaged a blood vessel while inserting the device and that Licudine may one day require more surgery.

Licudine sued Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Gupta in January 2013. Gupta’s alleged error required vascular surgery by another physician to save Licudine’s life, according to Kapp.

Her scar, which extends from her navel to her breastbone, caused severe emotional distress to a young woman who often wore two-piece bathing suits for rowing activities or during recreation, Kapp said.

“She can’t stand to look at herself in the mirror,” Kapp said.

Licudine was accepted at several law schools after graduating from USC, but her ongoing medical struggles have forced her to delay making a decision, Kapp said. Now 25, she has a life expectancy of another 57 years and she likely would have earned about \$100,000 annually as an attorney, Kapp said.

Licudine’s abdominal pain often keeps her up late at night and she has to make up for it by sleeping much of the day, he said.

Licudine was nominated as USC’s female Trojan athlete of the year in 2012.

Former USC rowing athlete awarded \$1M in medical suit

 [mynews1a.com /crime/2015/06/02/former-usc-rowing-athlete-awarded-1m-in-medical-suit/](http://mynews1a.com/crime/2015/06/02/former-usc-rowing-athlete-awarded-1m-in-medical-suit/)

Colleen Park

A jury awarded more than \$1 million Tuesday to a former USC women's rowing team coxswain who suffered a near-life-threatening injury during gall bladder surgery.

Dionne Licudine sued Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Dr. Ankur Gupta alleging medical malpractice, saying she suffered injuries and was left with an unsightly scar during surgery to remove her gall bladder in February 2012.

The jury awarded Licudine \$30,000 for past and future pain and suffering, \$285,000 for past loss of earnings and \$730,000 for future loss of earnings, for a total of \$1.045 million, according to her attorney, Howard Kapp.

Kapp said he was "very pleased with the economic damages," but found the \$30,000 award for pain and suffering "incomprehensible." He said even the hospital's attorney estimated that if the jury found negligence, the award should be between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

Kapp argued during trial of the lawsuit that Gupta made mistakes that caused Licudine to suffer adhesions causing bowel obstructions as well as a visible scar. Defense attorney Raymond Moore blamed Licudine's complications on the inherent risks of the procedure.

Kapp displayed for jurors a photo of Licudine strapped to machines in her hospital bed and another image displaying her scar. He said that despite the medical setback, Licudine rejoined her teammates a month later as they rowed to victory in the San Diego Crew Classic.

Moore said Gupta was not negligent and used sound medical judgment in inserting an instrument called a trocar into Licudine's abdomen so that her body cavity could be viewed with the help of a camera attached.

"But that does come at the price of increasing the risks of striking organs because you can't see them," Moore said.

Gupta performed the surgery along with Dr. Brendan Carroll, who was dropped as a defendant in the case.

Kapp said Gupta damaged a blood vessel while inserting the device and that Licudine may one day suffer a complete bowel obstruction that would require more surgery.

Licudine sued Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and Gupta in January 2013. Gupta's alleged error required vascular surgery by another physician to save Licudine's life, according to Kapp.

Her scar, which extends from her navel to her breastbone, caused severe emotional distress to a young woman who often wore two-piece bathing suits for rowing activities or during recreation, Kapp said.

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