

Freeport man to sue LI hospital over hepatitis diagnosis

BY ANN GIVENS

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Thomas Robinson thought the worst of his medical woes were finally behind him when he was released from Nassau University Medical Center after 18 days.

That is, until he got a letter in May from the hospital, explaining that there was a chance that an employee had pricked him with an insulin pen that had already been used on other patients.

At the hospital's recommendation, Robinson, 65, of Freeport, got tested for HIV, and hepatitis B and C, and one of his worst fears was realized: He found that he was carrying the antibodies for the hepatitis B virus.

Yesterday, Robinson's attorney, **Dan Flanzig**, of Mineola, filed court papers announcing Robinson's intent to sue Nassau University Medical Center for putting him at risk.

"I think they were careless in what they did," Robinson said. "My whole household was in danger because of what I didn't know." Hepatitis B affects the liver and can be transmitted through body fluids.

Shelley Lotenberg, a spokeswoman for NUMC, said the hospital took the appropriate steps when the possible lapse was discovered. She said she could not comment on individual patients' cases.

"We proactively notified all patients potentially exposed to this practice," she said. "We do not know for sure that the pens were improperly used, nor is there any evidence that anyone contracted an infection as a result."

In May, the East Meadow hospital said nurses had reported hearing rumors about other nurses using insulin pens on more than one patient. Insulin pens are prefilled syringes meant to be used just once.

A state investigation into the reuse of insulin pens at the hospital is in its final stages, and the results are not yet public, a spokesman for the Department of Health said.

Robinson, a truck driver, said he was admitted to the hospital last winter after he fell while working in his driveway, injuring his spine. While there, he said the nurses would not give him the pill that he normally takes for his diabetes. Instead, they insisted on using the insulin pen.

He said what makes him most angry is that the hospital did not notify him sooner. He said he did not get the hospital's letter until five months after he was exposed to the disease. If he had contracted HIV, he would have been exposing his wife to the disease for at least two months after the three-month incubation period before he even found out he was at risk, he said.

"I don't think you need to be a medical practitioner to know you don't use the same needle on multiple patients," Flanzig said.

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