

Burns sustained during surgery
17HDC02431, 30 August 2019

District health board ~ Orthopaedic surgeon ~ Burns ~ Diathermy ~ Right 4(1)

A man was admitted to hospital for knee surgery. During the surgery, the orthopaedic surgeon applied an iodine and alcohol solution to the edge of the wound to minimise the risk of infection. The surgeon then applied diathermy without waiting for the alcohol solution to dry. As a result, the man's leg caught fire and he sustained burns.

Findings

It was held that the district health board failed to provide appropriate care, and breached Right 4(1) owing to the fire that occurred during the knee surgery, and for failing to have in place an appropriate fire hazard policy for operating theatres.

It was also held that the orthopaedic surgeon did not provide services with reasonable care and skill and breached Right 4(1), as the use of diathermy immediately after an application of alcohol solution caused the man's leg to catch fire.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the district health board provide an apology to the man; confirm the implementation of its new policy forbidding the use of alcohol-based solution until diathermy has been disabled, and conduct a review of the effectiveness of the policy; prepare a fire hazard policy; audit staff compliance with its existing guideline on skin preparation for surgery; and arrange training for its staff on the fire hazard policy and surgical skin preparation guideline.

It was recommended that the orthopaedic surgeon provide an apology to the man and undertake further training about fire hazards in operating theatres.