

**Postoperative care of deteriorating patient in
private hospital following gynaecological surgery
(06HDC17645, 19 March 2008)**

Obstetrician and gynaecologist ~ General surgeon ~ Private hospital ~ Laparoscopic surgery ~ Gynaecological surgery ~ Sodium level ~ Haematoma ~ Postoperative care ~ Readmission to hospital ~ Bowel complication ~ Coroner ~ Communication ~ Responsibility of private hospital ~ Right 4(1)

A man complained about the services provided to his late wife by an obstetrician and gynaecologist at a private hospital. Following routine gynaecological surgery, the woman developed a serious postoperative complication which went undetected for 13 days. Despite emergency surgery that was performed once the complication was diagnosed, treatment in two separate intensive care units, and two further emergency operations, the woman's condition deteriorated. She died 21 days after the initial surgery.

It was held that the surgeon did not breach the Code in relation to the preoperative information provided and the standard of surgical technique. However, the surgeon should have had a higher degree of suspicion and investigation, should have referred the woman for a review by a general surgeon at an earlier stage, and should have attended her in person when she was readmitted to hospital. For the above reasons, the surgeon failed to provide services with reasonable care and skill, and therefore breached Right 4(1).

It was held that the general surgeon, whom the gynaecological surgeon consulted regarding the woman's care, did not breach the Code. The hospital was also not found in breach of the Code.