

Contra Costa Times

## **Family will sue Kaiser over woman's coma**

By Julie Appleby

Staff writer

Guity Manteghi lapsed into a coma following a heart problem more than a year ago because her doctors failed to tell her about the condition or properly treat it, according to a lawsuit expected to be filed in Contra Costa County Superior Court today.

The 39-year-old Walnut Creek woman had three electrocardiograms indicating she had heart abnormalities before her heart failed on Jan. 6, 1996, according to the suit, which was outlined by the family and their lawyer at a press conference Thursday.

Kaiser Permanente Medical Center spokeswoman Lila Peterson said Thursday that the HMO's attorneys had just received a copy of the complaint for damages and would review the case Monday.

"In the meantime, what we can say is her care was entirely appropriate," Peterson said, adding that she believes Manteghi was told her condition.

Manteghi's husband, Maleck, alleges that his wife was never told: "We had no idea. They just told her to cut down on her coffee."

Simple treatment with cardiac drugs might have prevented her collapse, said the family's lawyer, Bruce Fagel, who is also a doctor.

"The medical records indicated clear evidence of a problem and an opportunity to intervene. This was a tragedy that was preventable," said Fagel, a Beverly Hills attorney who has handled such high-profile cases as the 1990 death of college basketball star Hank Gathers. Gathers collapsed during a televised game and died of the same cardiac abnormality that struck Guity Manteghi.

The Times first wrote about the Manteghis in April, when Maleck was involved in an appeal to Blue Cross, the health insurance company the family switched to shortly before his wife's collapse.

Eight weeks after his wife became comatose, the Hill Physicians Medical Group in San Ramon — under contract with Blue Cross — said it would no longer pay for her stay at a convalescent home because she did not need skilled nursing care.

Only skilled care, defined as that provided by medical professionals, is covered by most health insurance plans.

Manteghi appealed the decision to Blue Cross, which overturned the Hill decision. His insurance plan pays in full for his wife's care 100 days a year, and covers half the bills the rest of the year.

He says he and Blue Cross split the \$9,000 to \$10,000 monthly bill for his wife's nursing home care, which does not include physical therapy.

The lawsuit he plans to file today seeks damages from Kaiser, including coverage for his wife's past medical expenses, loss of her income and contribution to the family — and payment for her ongoing medical care.

Fagel said Guity Manteghi needs intensive physical therapy and could ultimately be brought home if she were provided with 24-hour nursing care at a cost of \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year.