

Comments for the North Carolina House of Representatives
House Blue Ribbon Task Force on Medical Malpractice
Committee Hearing – Wednesday, February 11, 2004

My name is Michael Hood.

I'm a bit nervous because I am not a speaker and because I am unable to use any notes (since I am blind). I've been blind for about a year and have not yet learned to read Braille.

As I stand here today, I want you to understand the view from my perspective. When I look out among you, all I see is darkness. Everything is black. Pitch black. My doctors tell me that I will never see again. No shapes, no shadows, no light. Nothing. It's been that way for about a year. About a year ago this week.

Before, I was a happy ordinary man living in Greensboro, North Carolina, with my beautiful wife, Toni, and my two beautiful children, Samuel and Shalom. Toni and I have been married for 14 years. Toni is a teacher. She had school today and could not be here with me. Samuel is now 9 years old and is in the third grade. Shalom is 7 years old and is in the first grade. I worked with Avery Dennison as a die cutter operator for 23 years. I enjoyed working for them and hoped to work many more years with them before retiring.

All that changed about a year ago. It was then that I got sick with a fever of about 103 degrees and had some swelling around my eyes. I called my doctor and went in to see him the next day, Friday. I still had a high fever and more swelling around my eyes. My doctor did not do any blood work to check for an infection and did not give me any antibiotics. The infection that I had went undiagnosed and untreated. Instead, I was given steroids for the swelling. Over the weekend, I followed the instructions my doctor gave to me. On Monday, I woke up with blood coming out of my eyes, which were swollen shut. I could not see. I ended up in the hospital where they did surgery and gave me antibiotics for the infection. But it was too late. The damage had been done. I now understand that my doctor should have suspected that I had an infection and should have given me antibiotics, which would have prevented me from losing my sight.

People ask me how is my life different now that I am blind. It would be easier to tell you what is the same. Nothing is the same. Everything is different. Losing



my eyesight affects everything that I do. Unfortunately, there is very little that I can do now on my own. I can no longer work. I stay at home during the day. I pray a lot. I listen to books on tape. I was given a computer which reads to me words on a paper after it is scanned in. I listen to television. My wife takes me to church several times a week and we pray there together. When my children come home in the afternoons, I try to help them with their homework. My little girl asked my wife when I would be able to see her again – when I would be able to see how her hair looks. The thing that I miss the most is seeing my children's faces and watching them grow.

I understand that you all are considering changing the law to make it so that people who have been injured by preventable medical errors can only recover so much for their injuries. I don't understand how anyone can decide in advance that being completely blind is only worth \$250,000 – or any other number for that matter. It would seem that every case is different. The one-size-fits-all amount is unfair to the people who have been hurt the most.

I have trouble understanding why doctors should be treated any differently from others who injure people through mistakes. As I understand it, the jury never considers the question of how much unless they have already determined that the doctor was at fault. If that has already been determined, why shouldn't a jury decide on what is the right amount? Why should doctors be protected or let off? Shouldn't we all bear responsibility for what we do? It seems that it would make doctors less responsible. I'm not an expert, but it seems that the focus should be on patient protection and looking for ways to reduce medical errors.

Please remember me and others like me when you consider making changes to the laws. We don't have anyone to protect our rights. Only you stand between us and the powerful insurance companies. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

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