

Family of Las Vegas man wins \$200M verdict against Sierra Health

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The family of a Las Vegas man who was denied health insurance coverage for a specific type of lung cancer treatment, then later died, has won a \$200 million civil verdict against his health insurance provider, according to court records.

The family of William George “Bill” Eskew sued Sierra Health and Life Insurance in 2019. A jury trial led to an initial \$40 million verdict a week ago, along with another \$160 million in punitive damages against Sierra Health in the courtroom of District Judge Nadia Krall.

Sierra Health is a UnitedHealthcare company, which is owned by UnitedHealth Group.

The company plans to appeal, a spokeswoman said.

“We are disappointed by the jury’s verdict,” United HealthCare spokeswoman Maria Gordon Shydlo said in an email to the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

“The verdict and damages awarded do not reflect the facts of the case or the laws that apply here,” she said.

A civil complaint filed by Eskew’s estate indicates that Eskew and his wife, Sandra, purchased a health insurance policy from Sierra Health in January 2016.

“Beginning in or about 2015, Bill was diagnosed with lung cancer,” the complaint said.

Eskew ultimately traveled to Texas for medical treatment where it was recommended he undergo “proton beam therapy,” the lawsuit states. The coverage for that specific type of treatment was later denied by Sierra Health, according to the records.

“Without the proton beam therapy, Bill died on March 12, 2017,” the complaint said.

Attorneys Matthew L. Sharp of Reno and Doug Terry filed the lawsuit.

“Sierra Health had a hidden policy and procedure to automatically deny any claim for proton beam therapy,” Sharp said Monday. “They denied the claim without investigation, without consideration of the insurance contract, and in knowing disregard of Nevada law.”

Sharp and Terry said in a phone interview that the cancer treatment Eskew received caused severe damage to his esophagus.

“As a result of that damage, Bill suffered tremendously, unnecessarily and became basically a shell of himself,” Sharp said.

Terry said the verdict represents “a statement by members of the community in Clark County, and Las Vegas, that the conduct of Sierra Health and Life in this case is not acceptable, and that it needs to stop.”