

## Healthcare facility settles lawsuit over shaving of elderly Sikh man

**Westchester County, New York:** Westchester County Healthcare settled a case where an elderly Sikh man, Pyara Singh Sahansra, was negligently shaved by staff while he was in long-term care. UNITED SIKHS and law-firm Storzer and Greene, LLC secured a settlement including \$20,000 in compensation for Pyara Singh's family, training for the facilities' staff, and adoption of hospital care guidelines specific for the care of Sikh patients as part of the staff training materials.

The incident occurred at the Taylor Care Center division of Westchester Medical Center in Westchester County, New York. Pyara Singh's family had previously spoken with Taylor Care Center staff about Sikhs and the religious practice of keeping kesh, unshorn hair, and had also placed signs on Pyara Singh's bed to remind staff of the Sikh practice. Taylor Care Center management removed the signs stating that the signs were not allowed, but assured the family that Pyara Singh's hair would not be cut. A few months later, the healthcare facility employed a new nurse and did not train the nurse regarding the care of Sikh patients, after which the nurse cut Pyara Singh's beard, eyebrows, and mustache on June 3, 2007, violating his deeply held religious principles. Sadly, Pyara Singh, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, passed away on July 18, 2007, a little over a month after the incident.



Pyara Singh

After the incident occurred, UNITED SIKHS was contacted by Pyara Singh's son, Upinderjit Singh, and assisted the family with their case by working with the law-firm of Storzer and Greene, which specializes in claims involving free practice of religion, and by liaising with the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division who began an investigation and informed the hospital that it was doing so. Attorneys Roman Storzer and Robert Greene, after consultation with UNITED SIKHS' legal team, filed a case on behalf of Pritan Kaur, Pyara Singh's wife, alleging violations of free exercise of religion and assault and battery by staff, after which the parties began settlement discussions.

Settlement discussions centered around the training of hospital staff to ensure that the same treatment did not happen to other Sikh patients. The final settlement included \$20,000 in compensation to Pyara Singh's family, training of Taylor Care Center employees on Sikh patient care, and adoption of UNITED SIKHS' Guidelines for Hospital Admittance and Care/Extended Care for Sikhs as part of nursing department orientation. "We are very pleased with this agreement. It points the way for other health care facilities across the country to treat Sikh persons with true respect for their religious human rights," stated attorney Robert Greene, who led the settlement discussions.

"We applaud the willingness of Westchester County Health Care to accommodate the religious needs of Sikh patients," said First Amendment attorney Roman P. Storzer. "When people are at their most vulnerable, it's important to know that the First Amendment doesn't get lost in the process."

UNITED SIKHS' Staff Attorney Jaspreet Singh commented, "It is extremely unfortunate that a Sikh patient in a hospital was treated in such an egregious manner. We are



working to have Guidelines for Hospital Admittance and Care/Extended Care for Sikhs adopted by hospitals around the country so that incidents like this one can be avoided in the future." It was brought to our attention that there have been previous incidents like this one that have gone unreported. They are working with healthcare professionals to finalize the guidelines and advocate for adoption of the guidelines in hospitals throughout the country.

Commenting on the incident Upinderjit Singh stated, "This was a very difficult time for my family to face, especially for my mother. My father was a devout Sikh and we all experienced a shock when his kesh were cut by the nurse." He added, "I appreciate UNITED SIKHS' diligent efforts in helping us not only to pursue my father's case, but also in helping other Sikhs so they do not face the same problem in the future."

Source: [Press Release](#)

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1.

*randhir singh aujla* says:  
April 14, 2009 at 6:32 am

It would seem that human ideas just don't touch some people. You can do all you like with the persons like the one who has cut Pyara Singh's hair, it will not make any difference. There is a no solution for a person full of pure malice an evil, down to the last speck of blood in his body. The quality of the recruitment staff beside the quality of the training of staff, who are specifically taught to spot signs of evil doers should help in large number of cases but not all.

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