



Texas Jury Renders Historic Multi-Million Dollar Verdict Against Rogue Pill Mill for Dispensing Prescription Drugs That Caused Man's Death

A Texas Jury has decided that a rogue pill mill and its physician should pay \$10,700,000 in damages to the family of a man that died from prescription drugs obtained from the clinic. The verdict is believed to be the first rendered in a civil court against a pill mill due to a death caused by the prescription cocktail of vicodin, xanax, and soma.

Houston, TX ([PRWEB](#)) January 20, 2011 -- Hastings Law Firm P.C. has obtained what is being called an historic verdict against a "pill mill" on behalf of the family of an accidental overdose victim. On Tuesday, January 18, 2010, a civil jury in Houston, Texas handed down a verdict of \$10,700,000 against several individuals involved in the "pill mill" trade for their actions in causing the overdose death of Michael Skorpenske. The verdict is being described as historic by several media outlets because it is the first known civil jury verdict against a "pill mill".

Evidence at trial showed that the Family Medi Clinic in The Woodlands, Texas operated as a "pill mill" during 2007. A "pill mill" has been described as a pain management clinic that is set up to reap enormous profits from the sale of narcotics without a legitimate medical use. The Centers for Disease Control has named the Houston, Texas area as one of the worst places for "pill mills" in the United States.

The jury's verdict included the both the Family Medi Clinic and its Medical Director, Maurice S. Conte, M.D. Evidence at trial showed that Dr. Conte was involved in at least 17 "pill mills" in 2007. Evidence collected during the case showed that Dr. Conte was personally responsible for over 15,000 prescriptions of a deadly combination of prescription narcotics, including Vicodin, Soma, and Xanax, in a relatively short period of time. The combination of those drugs, often referred to as "the cocktail" has no legitimate medical use according to experts at trial.

It was also shown at trial that Dr. Conte rarely, if ever, visited the clinics where he was Medical Director. Instead, he met with the clinic owners at a cigar bar where he received cash in exchange for signed prescription pads. Conte eventually surrendered his medical license. During the trial, he repeatedly took the 5th amendment in response to questions from the family's attorney. It is currently unknown where he has hidden the cash payments, believed to be in the millions. The jury awarded the family compensatory damages in the amount of \$1,700,000 and assessed punitive damages in the amount of \$8,000,000 against Dr. Conte.

The jury also assessed \$1,000,000 in punitive damages against the Family Medi Clinic. Evidence showed that the Family Medi Clinic was run by Melissa Martin, a part time medical assistant, and Lewis Martin, a Harris County Sheriff's Deputy, as well as a chiropractor, Michael Kabzinski. The clinic placed a sign on the freeway advertising physicals and pain management. Evidence showed that some patients with lengthy drug distribution convictions drove over forty miles to come to the clinic and obtain narcotics. The clinic allegedly lost most of their records following Skorpenske's death.

The jury also found that Jimmy Moore Jr. was negligent in his dealings with Dr. Conte and the Family Medi Clinic and assessed damages of approximately \$85,000. Moore, an executive recruiter, was retained by The Family Medi Clinic to find a Medical Director. Evidence showed that Mr. Moore had placed Dr. Conte at other



clinics as well.

Michael Skorpenske was 54 at the time of his death. He had sustained a series of back injuries that had left him disabled. He was survived by two adult children, a 15 year old daughter, and 86 year old mother. The family expressed their satisfaction with the verdict and commended the jury for their clear message to “pill mills” and rogue doctors. The family sought the services of Hastings Law Firm P.C. after the local district attorney, DEA, and other agencies failed to investigate or take any action against Dr. Conte.

The case was styled Augusta Jackson, as wrongful death beneficiary of Michael Skorpenske v. Maurice S. Conte, M.D., et. al., Cause No. 2009-41648, 234th District Court, Harris County, Texas. The Plaintiffs were represented by Tommy R. Hastings of Hastings Law Firm P.C. and Joe B. Stephens of the Stephens Law Firm.

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