



\$5.5 million granted in 2 medical claims

GBMC, radiologist to pay couple \$2.5 million

By ANTHONY PIPITONE
SUN STAFF

The Greater Baltimore Medical Center and a former radiologist there have agreed to pay an Eastern Shore couple \$2.5 million to settle a medical malpractice suit.

Under terms of the settlement reached Friday in a conference with Baltimore County Circuit Court Judge Frank E. Cicone, Clarence and Helen Burton, of Parsonsburg in Wicomico County, will receive the money in a lump sum, said their attorneys, Howard A. Janet and Stephen L. Snyder.

GBMC and Dr. George J. Richards Jr., who has been accused of giving patients more radiation than was necessary, will each pay half of the settlement — the largest share ever agreed to by GBMC in a case involving

Richards, Janet said.

Joseph J. Wich Jr., GBMC's attorney, would not comment on the settlement, noting the hospital has filed a cross-claim against Richards for money it has lost in malpractice suits stemming from the radiologist's work.

The Burton case had been set for trial April 8.

Richards, who no longer practices medicine, gave Clarence Burton 40 radiation treatments between May 13 and Aug. 15, 1972, to destroy a malignant tumor in his throat, according to the suit.

After reconstructive surgery that September, Burton, now 66, was declared free of cancer and returned to work as a tractor-trailer driver.

By late 1975, Burton began feeling leg cramps, which eventually spread throughout his body until he was forced to give up his work when partial paralysis appeared in January 1980.

Burton was confined to a wheelchair when he became paralyzed from

the chest down, the suit alleges.

The spinal cord injury that caused Burton's paralysis resulted from Richards' excessive doses of radiation, according to a March 1982 diagnosis, the suit states.

Insurers of Richards and his codefendants have paid at least \$10 million in damages and settlements since 1983 to former patients injured by Richards' treatments. Several other suits are pending.

Janet said GBMC's role in settling the Burtons' suit indicates the hospital is "paying a price for the tunnel vision they had since the mid-1960s," when Richards began using radiation to attack cancer cells.

The hospital derived "a perceived prestige and financial benefit" from having radiation therapy, Janet said, adding officials there "permitted the man to continue to practice at GBMC, despite knowing people were being injured."