



Back Surgeon Is Hit with Large Malpractice Decision in Florida

Posted On: **February 9, 2010** by [Patrick A. Malone](#)

This blog has a recurring theme of urging patients to be careful about the alleged wonders of minimally invasive surgery, and also to check a surgeon's credentials and experience carefully. These themes both come out in a new story about a legal case. An arbitration panel headed by a retired chief judge has assessed damages of nearly \$12 million against a well known Florida spinal surgeon for allegedly crippling a patient.

The surgeon is Dr. Alfred Bonati, who operates his own "Bonati Institute," a glass-walled building near a highway in Pasco, Florida. The institute's specialty is minimally invasive back surgery.

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According to the [St. Petersburg Times](#), Dr. Bonati has no hospital privileges and has been tagged by a series of lawsuits since the early 1990s.

Lack of hospital privileges is a red flag for patient safety. Most doctors who have even a small chance of needing to hospitalize a patient will make sure they apply for privileges at a qualified hospital. Hospitals are required by accreditation standards to perform at least a minimal investigation of the doctor's skills and credentials before accepting him or her on staff.

A footnote to this story is that the damages decision of nearly \$12 million came from a panel of three professional arbitrators, including a retired chief judge of the Sixth Florida Judicial Circuit. That shows that sober decision-makers, not just emotional juries, can find large damages justified in malpractice cases when the amount of harm warrants the numbers.

The victim, William Clark, was represented by Steve Yerrid of Tampa, a top plaintiff's malpractice attorney.

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