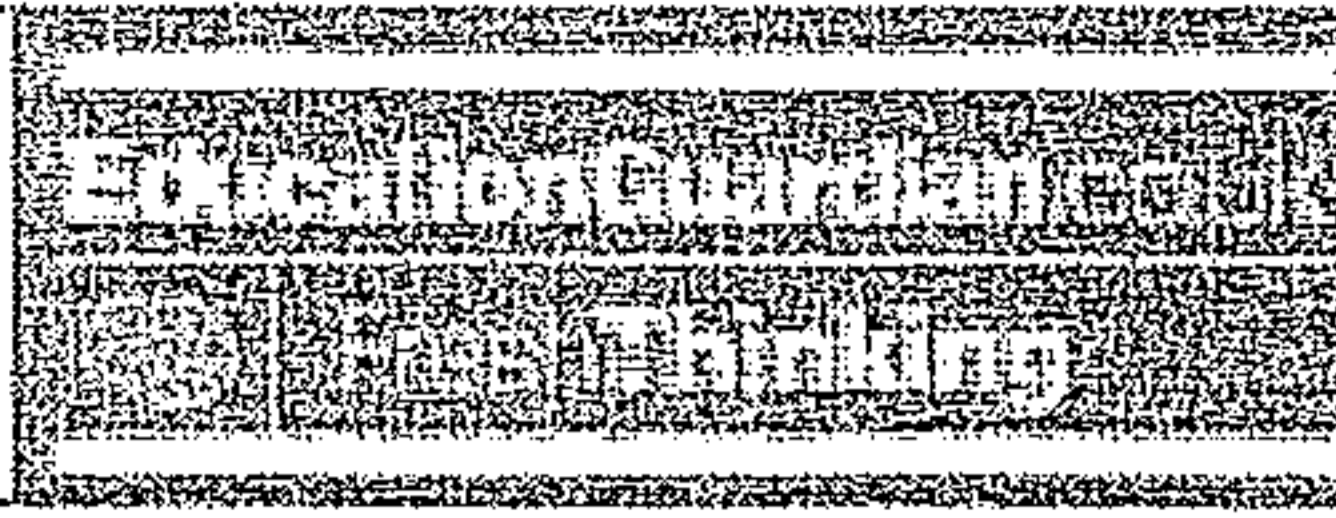


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## Surgeon admits guilt for killing

Last-minute change of plea in trial for negligence

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A consultant surgeon accused of killing two patients through gross negligence dramatically changed his plea yesterday and admitted killing one of the women.

Steven Walker, 47, was accused of the manslaughter of Jean Robinson, 66, and Dorothy McPhee, 71, at Blackpool Victoria hospital nine years ago.

Mr Walker, who was poised to enter the witness box at the Old Bailey, changed his plea from not guilty and admitted killing Mrs McPhee. The prosecution asked for all remaining charges against the surgeon to be left on file.

They include two further manslaughter charges and two relating to a theatre register, which had been found in his loft years after the women died.

Mrs McPhee, from Blackpool, had been diagnosed with bowel cancer in 1994 and had undergone an operation by another surgeon.

The following year she was referred to Mr Walker after a tumour was found on her liver. He had told colleagues at the hospital he was an expert in liver surgery.

But during the course of the operation, Mrs McPhee suffered heavy and catastrophic blood loss. She died shortly after losing 36 pints of blood during the operation.

While she was bleeding to death on the operating table, Mr Walker turned his back on her to have his photograph taken.

His actions horrified other theatre staff who were trying to save her life.

As he posed in a blood-splattered gown next to a section of liver which he had cut out, Mrs McPhee was losing more blood.

The prosecution said the standard of care fell short of what should be expected of a reasonably competent consultant surgeon of his experience.

Mrs McPhee's husband Donald said there had been a strange atmosphere when he walked into the unit after the operation. "There was something strange about it - suspicious," he told the court. "I was sure she died in the operating theatre. I was more shocked than anything."

A coroner certified both deaths as due to natural causes. But in 2001 the same coroner invited Lancashire police to investigate the circumstances of the deaths. Mr Walker was charged with manslaughter in June 2003.

Mr Walker, of Camberley, Surrey, had been due to face another trial for the manslaughter of a third patient - 63-year-old Margaret Wilson, who died in January 1998.

At an earlier hearing of the General Medical Council, its disciplinary panel was told that 16 anaesthetists at the

hospital had refused to work with him.

He was suspended from the hospital in 1999 after an operation during which 86-year-old Mabel Saville lost a large amount of blood. She died three months later.

Mr Walker was struck off the medical register in November 2001 after a number of complaints of botched operations were proved. The GMC said he had performed surgery beyond the limit of his confidence and skill.

One patient said she felt "like a freak" after he attempted to rebuild her breast following a mastectomy. He appealed a year later and his name was restored to the register on the condition that he did not operate on anyone. But he was suspended again in July 2003 after he was charged with manslaughter.

Mr Walker will be sentenced next Wednesday.

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