

# Baker City resident sues hospital, surgeon

Plaintiff claims post-surgery infection caused permanent disability

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A Baker City woman has filed a lawsuit against Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City and a former surgeon seeking up to \$10 million in damages for injuries she suffered due to an infection following ankle surgery in the spring of 2020.

Nancy Wilson filed the malpractice suit on Friday, April 22, in Baker County Circuit Court. The defendants are Saint Alphonsus and Dr. Eric Sandefur, who announced in December 2020 that he would “explore new opportunities in health care” and would no longer see patients.

Wilson is represented by Scott Levin, a Portland attorney.

Mark Snider, a spokesperson for the Saint Alphonsus Health Care System in Boise, said the company does not comment on litigation.

According to the lawsuit, Wilson broke her right ankle on April 21, 2020, when a wheel broke on her walker/wheelchair. She was taken to the emergency room at the Baker City hospital, where she was diagnosed with a fractured ankle.



Baker City Herald, File

Nancy Wilson filed a malpractice suit against Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City and Dr. Eric Sandefur on Friday, April 22, 2022, in Baker County Circuit Court.

Sandefur performed surgery on Wilson’s ankle on April 22, 2020, and a second surgery on May 7, 2020, according to the lawsuit.

Wilson contends that Sandefur failed to take action to deal with her infected surgical incision at multiple follow-up visits. According to the lawsuit, Wilson’s home nurse, as well as her husband and son, told Sandefur that the incision was not healing properly.

On July 9, 2020, Sandefur, during an exam, noted that the plate and screws he placed in Wilson’s ankle during the surgery were exposed. He ordered infection tests, which were pos-

itive, according to the lawsuit.

On July 16, 2020, Wilson was referred to the emergency room at Saint Alphonsus in Baker City by her primary care provider. She was then taken by ambulance to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise for “emergency repair surgery of the open and infected surgical wound,” according to the lawsuit.

The metal hardware Sandefur had installed was removed, and Wilson was in the hospital until Aug. 7, 2020, according to the lawsuit.

The infection had spread to her bones, resulting in removal of

infected bone that left her “permanently disabled,” according to the lawsuit.

“As a result of the non-healing surgical wound and subsequent infection, Plaintiff was completely bed-ridden for the next year and will never again regain her ability to ambulate normally,” the lawsuit states.

Wilson is asking for a jury trial.

According to the lawsuit, economic damages would be determined by a jury at trial, with the amount “not expected to exceed \$2 million.”

Wilson is also seeking noneconomic damages not to exceed \$8 million.

Another malpractice lawsuit with Sandefur and

Saint Alphonsus-Baker City as defendants is pending, with a trial set to start Sept. 6, 2022, in Baker County Circuit Court.

Mark and Lynne Brown of Union County filed the suit on Feb. 11, 2021, claiming Mark Brown lost mobility in his right leg as a result of the defendants’ negligence in a total knee replacement surgery that Sandefur performed on Oct. 16, 2018, at the Baker City hospital.

The Browns are seeking up to \$26 million in damages — up to \$10 million in economic damages for complications after the surgery and up to \$16 million in noneconomic damages.

Both the Browns’ lawsuit, and Wilson’s com-

plaint, contend that Saint Alphonsus should have known that Sandefur “had a history of surgical outcomes that resulted in the development of infections.”

A \$5.2 million lawsuit filed in September 2020 accused Sandefur, Saint Alphonsus-Baker City, and Veronica Crowder, a physician assistant who worked with Sandefur, of negligence in treating 6-year-old Avery Martin’s fractured arm in May 2018.

That lawsuit was dismissed with prejudice, meaning the complaint can’t be refiled, and without any costs to either side, in 2021, after the parties agreed to settle the case, according to court records.

## Morrow County commissioners suspend \$627K payment for Blue Mountain Community College

County will direct funds to Workforce Training Center in Boardman

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Morrow County Board of Commissioners last week voted to suspend a \$627,517 share of Amazon’s one-time gift payment to Blue Mountain Community College.

The move came Wednesday, April 20, after Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said she wanted the county to “hold on to those Blue Mountain Community College dollars.”

She said BMCC had “transitioned away somewhat from our workforce development” and she had felt “uncomfortable.” It was her preference, she said, to keep that money until more was known about where it would be directed. She said she wanted to ensure that it would benefit Morrow County.

According to Lindsay, because



Lindsay Russell Doherty

BMCC is not going to fund its part of the Workforce Training Center in Boardman, the county itself could direct the money to the center.

“I did confirm that those checks had not been cut yet,” she said.

This being the case, suspending the payment would be an easier matter than they would have been otherwise.

Commissioner Don Russell said this move by the commissioners would be an overreach.

“Blue Mountain has a board of directors that is elected by the public to oversee their budget,” he said. “They spend a dollar where they think it benefits the most people. And now for three county commissioners to weigh in and say, ‘We don’t like how your elected officials are running your budget, and

so we’re going to withhold tax dollars that, probably, rightfully, were yours,’ I think is wrong.”

He stated an error by Oregon led to a problem with distribution. The college, because it is in the taxing district, should have received an even greater share of the Amazon gift, he said.

Lindsay countered Russell by stating her belief this money should not be sent to Pendleton.

Following this discussion, there was a vote to suspend the money until research could be done. Commissioners voted 2-1, with board Chair Jim Doherty and Lindsay voting to suspend the money and Russell voting against.

Doherty said he was heartbroken over BMCC’s problems. The school is suffering low enrollment, cutbacks and budget shortfalls. The commissioner said he and his son are alumni of the college.

He said the topic of the suspension will be revisited at some point, following further discussions.

Lindsay, too, said more discussions are scheduled.

## Echo Fire Dept. receives grant from Wildhorse

By WYATT TEGGINS  
East Oregonian

ECHO — The Echo Rural Fire Protection District has received a \$20,000 grant from the Wildhorse Foundation to repair the fire station roof, helping to alleviate the \$26,000 price tag.

Operating on an annual budget of \$100,000, the district already spent \$25,000 on a new engine for a truck in early July 2021.

Then the roof at the station began leaking in late December.

“At first, we thought it would be an easy fix,” Fire Chief Delbert Gehrke said, “but then insulation began to fall into the firehouse, exposing a hole that allowed you to see through the ceiling.”

Gehrke decided to put an application in with the Wildhorse Foundation,

despite only a couple of weeks left in the application window, hoping for funds to help alleviate some of the cost.

To his surprise, the foundation was able to approve the request and write the check in a short time.

The Wildhorse Foundation uses 3% of the net gaming revenue made at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino to invest in community matters.

According to the Wildhorse Foundation’s website, thewildhorsefoundation.com, since the foundation’s indoctrination in 2001, the organization has provided \$13 million to local cultural, educational and public health endeavors.

In 2019 alone, the Wildhorse Foundation provided more than \$1.1 million to 127 organizations within the state.

# IMESD hires new director of school improvement

The Observer

PENDLETON — Intermountain ESD has hired a new director of school improvement for the 2022-2023 school year.

Dave Williams, the current principal at Sunridge Middle School in the Pendleton School District, has accepted the job. Williams has worked for the Pendleton district for 24 years, starting in 1998 as a high school teacher. He was the assistant principal at Pendleton High School for three years, the assistant principal at Sunridge Middle School for six years and has been the middle school’s principal since 2015.

Williams said from coaching to teaching to working as a building leader, he has been challenged and rewarded during his career. He said it will be difficult to leave the Pendleton School Dis-

trict because he has had the opportunity to create amazing relationships for the past 24 years in a great school district.

“However, I look forward to continuing to learn and grow professionally and support education in a different way. I’m super excited

to move into the position of director of school improvement,” he said.

Dr. Mark Mulvihill, IMESD superintendent, said the agency is pleased to welcome a seasoned administrator familiar with the Eastern Oregon region.

“Dave emerged as the

top candidate in a highly competitive pool. His extensive school leadership

experience and collaborative style will be assets to our team,” he said.

Williams will begin his new position on July 1, 2022.



Williams

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