

20 patients claim \$1m damages

By: MORGAN Jon

A MILLION dollars would be small compensation for the anguish suffered by the 20 people whose cancer biopsy results were misdiagnosed at Wanganui Hospital, said Katrina Beamsley, spokeswoman for the group filing a damages claim in the High Court this week.

The group's lawyer, **Grant Cameron**, said yesterday the claim against **Good Health Wanganui**, its residual health management unit and pathologist James Burkinshaw, totalling well over \$1 million, would be filed in Wanganui tomorrow or Thursday.

Mrs Beamsley claims she had a healthy breast removed after a private laboratory contracted to the hospital said it was cancerous. The other 19 people are all claiming Dr Burkinshaw misdiagnosed their biopsies.

Mrs Beamsley said the worry and stress caused by the misdiagnoses were "like carrying a tonne of rock on your shoulders".

"I really hope our group gets our million dollars. I read about a woman in the United States who got \$3 million for having a breast wrongly removed. I don't think our economy could stand it if we all got what we deserve -- they'd probably have to cut all the benefits.

"I can laugh about it now, but we've all been through hell."

Of the other claimants some had had healthy breasts removed and others had been wrongly told they had cervical cancer. Two sisters had been told they had breast cancer when they were healthy.

One of the group died last year and his family were part of the claim. He had been diagnosed as healthy when he had cancer, Mrs Beamsley said.

The claim involving allegations of misdiagnoses by Dr Burkinshaw between 1975 and 1994 will be for exemplary damages, which are designed to punish in cases where outrageous conduct or contemptuous disregard for the claimant's safety is proven. ACC legislation prevents the group suing for compensatory damages.

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