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## Kin sue Harvard over son's suicide

*The Boston Globe*

### Allege negligence in health services' drug prescription

By Shelley Murphy, Globe Staff | December 4, 2009

Harvard sophomore John Edwards was studying to become a doctor and training for the Boston Marathon in June 2007 when he sought help at the university's Health Services because he could not study for as many hours as some of his friends.

A nurse practitioner prescribed a drug to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a condition the overachieving Edwards had never been diagnosed with. Later, she prescribed two powerful antidepressants, Prozac and Wellbutrin, when he began complaining of anxiety, depression, and other side effects. Meanwhile, he was taking a fourth drug for acne, Accutane, that has been linked to suicidal thoughts.

"The Wellbutrin is having the effect that we were seeking . . . but unfortunately I feel like it has canceled out the anxiety-reducing effects of the fluoxetine [Prozac], as recently I've been pretty nervous," Edwards wrote in a Nov. 27, 2007, e-mail to the nurse practitioner, Marianne Cannon. "Let me know if I should schedule to come in and meet with you soon, or if I should change the med plan."

Cannon replied that she was concerned and told Edwards to schedule an appointment with her. Two days later, Edwards, 19, of Wellesley committed suicide in a bathroom at Harvard Medical School by suffocating himself with a plastic bag.

His father, John B. Edwards II of Wellesley, filed a suit Wednesday in Middlesex Superior Court alleging gross negligence by Cannon; Dr. Georgia Ede, who was the doctor who supervised her; and Harvard College, for causing his son's wrongful death.

Harvard released a statement yesterday, saying, "We understand how difficult it must be for John Edwards' family to cope with such a tragic loss, but we are confident that the care he received at Harvard University Health Services was thorough and appropriate and he was monitored closely by its physicians and allied health specialists."

Lisa G. Arrowood, a Boston attorney who represents Edwards, said, "We're alleging that the supervising physician in this case did not do her job, which was to supervise the nurse who didn't have medical training that a physician has. She was writing prescriptions for powerful drugs that were inappropriate in this combination and are associated with an increase of suicide."

The US Food and Drug Administration has warned that anyone taking Accutane, Prozac, or Wellbutrin should be monitored closely for suicidal thoughts.

"If a college such as Harvard cannot properly care for somebody like Johnny, I think it's very concerning who can," Edwards's father said. "They are leaders in medicine and psychiatry, and it's just astounding that at a school such as Harvard that something like this could happen."

Edwards was class president and valedictorian of Wellesley High School class of 2006 and played on the school's championship tennis team. His father said he was an A student at Harvard and was conducting stem cell research at Harvard Medical School.

He said he "thought it was bizarre" when his son told him he had been prescribed medication for attention deficit disorder, because "he never had an attention issue."

The suit accuses Cannon of prescribing Adderall, an amphetamine, which caused Edwards to have chest

pains and anxiety, then several months later prescribing Prozac and then Wellbutrin, even though Edwards told her he had taken Prozac when he was younger and experienced "out-of-control feelings."

Edwards said his son was upset by a break-up with a girlfriend two months earlier, but there was no indication he contemplated taking his own life. He was training for the marathon and had created a Harvard College Marathon Challenge Web page, with a goal of raising \$2,000 for two charities. "In six months, I hope to cross the finish line of the Boston Marathon," Edwards wrote.

His father said he last saw him when he dropped him off at his dorm two days after Thanksgiving. "He seemed to be in a good mood," Edwards said. "I gave him a kiss on the head and hugged him. He hugged me. I told him I loved him and left. He seemed to be fine."

Edwards said his son, a guitarist, was planning to perform "High and Dry" by Radiohead with a friend at a talent show the night after his death. The show was canceled because of the suicide, then held three months later. His only sister, Julia, now 16, learned the song and played it in his memory.

Edwards said he always hated to run, but after his son's death he started training and ran the Boston Marathon this year.

"I put some of Johnny's ashes in my back pocket," Edwards said, his voice cracking. "Together we ran the marathon."

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