

# Report: Diabetic care by police has improved

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Philadelphia police have made "significant improvements" in the way they process and care for people with diabetes held in lockups, the final report of a court-appointed monitor concludes.

The report by a team of monitors for the American Diabetes Association was filed Friday in federal court, seven years after civil rights lawyers sued for a Philadelphia cabaret owner with diabetes who said he nearly died after he was arrested over a liquor-code violation, held for almost 24 hours, and denied access to insulin, blood-pressure medicine and medical care.

The report says the city has taken "substantial steps" in officer training, identification of detainees with diabetes, and prompt transportation of diabetic detainees to police facilities with medical staff to monitor and treat diabetic emergencies.

But because many of the changes were made this year, after the formal monitoring period ended in October 2005, the American Diabetes Association offered to continue working with police to ensure the improvements are effective.

The report concludes that "it is in the interest of all parties to realize the complete vision of the settlement agreement."

Police Capt. Benjamin Naish said yesterday that the department intended to continue working with the association.

"We're very pleased," Naish said. "We've gone to the forefront on this issue and it's a significant one. We know from experience the dire consequences to someone who has this disease who doesn't get the medical care that is necessary."

Alan L. Yatvin, the lawyer who filed the original lawsuit, said another result of the suit was production of a high-quality training video about diabetes for police officers, a film coproduced by the police and the association.

"The ADA has distributed it and a lot of police departments have incorporated into their training," Yatvin said. "In this area, Philadelphia is on the cutting edge."

Diabetes is an illness in which the pancreas fails to produce insulin, the hormone the body needs to metabolize carbohydrates. For police officers, the disease can be problematic because some symptoms mimic alcohol intoxication. Police have arrested diabetics for intoxication and held them in a cell to "sleep it off."

For a person with diabetes, however, such treatment can cause brain damage or death.

Yatvin filed the suit in 2000. Within weeks of the first newspaper articles, four more diabetics joined the suit, complaining of similar treatment. So did the association, and the case was certified as a class action by a federal judge.

In March 2003, the city agreed to settle the case. A total of \$206,000 - awards ranging from \$200 to \$5,000 - was paid to 256 diabetics who became ill after being arrested and detained without proper care.

Seven of the more seriously injured did not participate in the class-action settlement and later individually settled their claims for a total of \$315,000 - awards ranging from \$15,000 to \$65,000, Yatvin said.

In addition to the training video, the settlement resulted in informational posters outlining the symptoms of diabetes created for each police district and lockup.

The settlement also resulted in a police policy to transfer all diabetic detainees who do not require immediate medical care from a district lockup to the main detention facility at police headquarters at Eighth and Race Streets, where a prison health services nurse is available to evaluate the detainees, monitor blood glucose levels, and provide other care.


The settlement was the second involving Philadelphia police and treatment of diabetic detainees. In 1982, the city signed a similar agreement resulting from a 1978 lawsuit by a diabetic detainee who suffered brain damage after police assumed he was drunk and did not provide medical treatment.

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