

# Quadriplegic argues for mandatory malpractice insurance

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**NEW BRITAIN** — At midlife, a time when many people are reaching the apex of their maturity and personal freedom, Linda Solsbury finds herself trapped in a body that once was a source of joy.

There's no hope she'll ever be free from her wheelchair and the daily indignities suffered by a quadriplegic. But even though she's almost completely paralyzed — unable to speak, chew or swallow and able only to wiggle her right index finger — the 45-year-old former nurse is not without resources.

They aren't financial resources, however.

Solsbury is indigent, despite the fact that three years ago a New London Superior Court jury awarded her \$10 million in compensation.

The problem, as she recently told the General Assembly's Public Health Committee in a written statement, is that the man a jury found to be responsible for causing her paralysis in 1985 — Waterford chiropractor Thomas Goulding — had no malpractice insurance.

Goulding took refuge in personal bankruptcy after the 1991 award and has not paid a cent of the award even though he's still in business, Solsbury testified.

Goulding, who is still working as a chiropractor, would not discuss the case when contacted earlier this week. But in a letter to a newspaper following the verdict, he de-

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nied that his treatment led to the stroke that paralyzed Solsbury.

Solsbury has since sued Goulding a second time, charging that he fraudulently transferred his assets before filing for bankruptcy protection. The lawsuit is pending in bankruptcy court.

Meanwhile, Connecticut taxpayers are spending \$181,000 a year to provide for Solsbury's care at the Hospital for Special Care in New Britain. It's a cost the taxpayers shouldn't have to bear, says the former New London resident.

"There should be safeguards in the health care system for consumers like me," she told the legislative committee in support of a bill requiring all Connecticut physicians and chiropractors to carry malpractice insurance.

"While an individual practitioner probably couldn't carry enough malpractice insurance to meet my own needs, some kind of coverage would have helped defray state costs for my care," she said.

Spokesmen for the Connecticut State Medical Association and the Connecticut Chiropractic Associa-

tion say the vast majority of their members already have insurance. Tim Norbek, executive director of the medical association, said his group does not plan to oppose the insurance bill, as it now stands.

Solsbury said her case makes it clear why such a law is needed.

"I am not telling any of this to elicit pity or sympathy," she told lawmakers. "I've achieved a measure of peace in my struggle with the reality of my situation."

Last week, in an interview at the Hospital for Special Care, she expounded on how she deals with her situation.

Rather than dwelling on the past — when she was a single parent busy earning a living, raising a teen-age daughter, going to college and pursuing her hobby as a ballet dancer — she says she concentrates on the present.

"I try to make the best of my situation," she said, slowly typing out the sentence on her lap-top computer.

One way Solsbury has dealt with her situation has been to take control of her personal environment.

She has filled her small room with live plants and personal items, including a small menagerie of stuffed animals. A reproduction of Monet's "Water Lilies" hangs on one wall.

"You get a wonderful feeling when you enter her room," says hospital spokeswoman Cathy-Lynne Coyle. "It's really peaceful in there."

But Solsbury, who has a TV set, table-top computer and a small library of books on tape in her room, has not turned her back on the world. If anything, she's the primary activist at the Hospital for Special Care.

Since arriving at the hospital in 1987, Solsbury has worked to establish the twice-yearly spiritual retreats for patients and staff. She also was instrumental in creating the weekly meetings at which patients air their views about how the institution can better meet their needs. And she helped write the script for a videotape aimed at making the staff more sensitive to patients, many of whom have disabilities similar to her own.

"Linda definitely has made an impact here," Coyle said. "She's very involved in what's happening."

Solsbury said someone in her condition has to fight constantly to be taken seriously as a person.

Although she constantly battles to change the world around her, she says the biggest change has been in her inner life.



Linda Solsbury is seen at the Hospital for Special Care in New Britain in this file photo of Sept. 13, 1993. Solsbury, a quadriplegic, won a \$10 million lawsuit against the chiropractor a jury found to be responsible for her paralysis, but has not collected a cent. The chiropractor had no malpractice insurance.