

## Lawyer: Surgeons left 16 items in German after op

January 17 2013

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A lawyer in Germany claims surgeons left up to 16 objects in her client's body after an operation for prostate cancer.

Annette Corinth says doctors removed a needle, compresses and surgical strips from banker Helmut Brecht after his [wounds](#) failed to heal properly following surgery in 2009.

The 77-year-old ex-banker died last year and his family is seeking €80,000 (\$106,216) damages for his suffering, plus costs, from the Henriettenstift hospital in Hannover.

A spokesman for the Protestant Church-linked organization that runs the hospital rejected the claims.

Achim Balkhoff told The Associated Press Thursday the objects couldn't have been left in the patient's body during the operation because the equipment wasn't in use at the hospital.

He added that the compensation demands were "unusually high" for such a case.

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Surgical slips such as these are rare, but with millions of operations performed worldwide each year mistakes do sometimes occur.

According to Loyola University in Chicago, citing medical studies, some 1,500 patients in the United States have surgical objects accidentally left inside them after surgery each year. Most of the objects are sponges used to control patient bleeding during long operations. They can lead to pain, infections and other medical complications.

Such cases have prompted doctors to coin the term "retained surgical items" and draw up guidelines to prevent them occurring. These include accounting for all items after surgery—such as with the help of RFID chips—and using equipment containing special strips that show up clearly in x-rays.

Some notable cases:

—In Dec. 2011, a man in Ohio who had two towels left in his body after surgery at a Veterans hospital won a \$275,000 settlement from the federal government.

—In Aug. 2012, California regulators fined a Fresno hospital \$50,000 for leaving a towel in a patient after abdominal surgery.

— In Sept. 2012, The Canberra Times of Australia reported that a patient required a second operation after a surgical instrument was left in the abdomen. The incident prompted Canberra hospitals to begin special training for staff to make sure they kept better track of instruments during surgery.

— In Feb. 2010, doctors in the Czech Republic discovered a foot-long metal tube had been left inside a woman's abdomen five months after surgery. The chief of the clinic said four staff members had been punished.

— In March 2009, a Kentucky jury awarded a woman \$2.5 million after

she required surgery to remove a sponge left inside her after a hysterectomy three years earlier. Part of her small intestine had to be removed.

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