

PAULA'S STORY

A real case demonstrating
the unfairness of damage caps.

Paula's Story

Paula underwent cosmetic surgery to correct a breast deformity. She could not know that the doctor recommended to her was ill-qualified for the job. As a result of numerous mistakes by this doctor, Paula was left permanently scarred.

Paula appeared to have it all. She was 26 years old, attractive, physically fit, had a good job, and was a single mom to a young son. Paula, however, was bothered by the unusual shape of her breasts, which was a congenital anomaly known as tuberous breast deformity. She believed that the abnormality was particularly noticeable, and it affected her perception of herself and her self-confidence, particularly as a young, single woman. She was very sensitive to her appearance in bathing suits, summertime clothes, and formal dresses, which invariably are formfitting and somewhat revealing. She believed that others always noticed the problem.

Paula decided to speak with a plastic surgeon to find out if anything could be done to correct this physical abnormality and make her feel more comfortable with her own body. She was referred to a plastic surgeon by a company that provided financing for cosmetic procedures. After an initial examination, the physician recommended breast implants to provide Paula with symmetrical, full, and normally-shaped breasts. Although Paula was not fully comfortable with the idea of breast implants, she decided to undergo the surgery in the hopes that she would feel, and look, more normal afterwards. At the time that she made her decision and when she had the surgery, Paula did not know that the doctor that had been recommended to her was ill-qualified to do the procedure. He only had training in general surgery and had failed, on three separate occasions, to pass the examinations necessary to become Board certified in general surgery. Paula did not know that her surgeon had no formal training in breast augmentation or reconstruction.

The outcome of the breast implant surgery did little to make Paula feel, or look, more normal. Because of numerous mistakes made by the physician performing the surgery, Paula's result was horrible to look at and devastating to her. The physician tried twice more to surgically correct the multiple problems with Paula's breasts, but each surgery only made things worse. After the three surgeries by this physician, she had lost blood supply to both of her nipples, resulting in bleeding and lack of sensation. The left nipple was far worse than the right. It oozed pus and then turned a hideous black. It looked charred, as if someone had held a flame to it. The infection caused by the dying tissue ate into her left breast until she had suffered a through-and-through loss of the entire nipple. Because of the infections that developed from the dying tissue, both of her breast implants had to be removed. There was substantial breast tissue loss following the procedures. Paula no longer has the option of natural breasts. Her chest and breast area were hideously scarred by the original physician's three surgical procedures.

Paula sought help from a well-qualified, well-trained plastic surgeon, who, in order to attempt to restore her breasts to their physical integrity, performed nine (9) additional surgeries! Each surgery was painful, and each was accompanied by the fear that her breasts would never look anywhere near normal. She has had to undergo reimplantation surgery of both breasts. Both of her areolas required reconstruction, including some skin grafting, the donor site for which was her left thigh. In order to try to re-create a left nipple for Paula, she was forced to undergo additional skin grafting, which had to be done in stages. Because the skin of the nipple is so different from most of the skin on the human body, the donor site for the nipple graft was Paula's labia. Paula's new physician also tried her best to minimize the scars on her chest and breasts.

Despite her new surgeon's best efforts, Paula has been left without a natural left nipple, with left thigh scarring, with permanent scarring of both breasts and chest, and permanent breast asymmetry. Her attempts to look and feel normal have resulted in exactly the opposite. Because of her substantial disfigurement, she feels ashamed, tremendously self-conscious and hopeless. She does not believe that she will ever have an intimate relationship again. Even if a man will overlook her scarred and deformed body, she does not believe that she will ever feel comfortable enough with herself to continue a relationship with a man who desires intimacy. Her future is a future alone, with her child.

Paula's original surgeon was indicted on charges of Medicare fraud unrelated to Paula's care. He pled guilty to a felony and was sentenced. He is still licensed to practice medicine in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



Paula went to a physician seeking to correct a “tuberous breast deformity”. She did not know that her doctor had no formal training in this type of corrective surgery. Because of numerous mistakes by this physician, Paula’s result was horrible to look at and devastating to her.





The physician tried twice more to surgically correct the multiple problems with Paula's breasts, but each surgery only made things worse. She then sought help from a new surgeon, who, in order to help her, performed nine more operations. Despite her new surgeon's best efforts, Paula has been left without a natural left nipple, and has been permanently scarred on both her breasts and chest and her left thigh.