

The Hour

Husband of coma victim wins justice award

By STEVE KOBAK, Hour Staff Writer

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NORWALK -- A Norwalk native whose wife spent more than a decade in a coma due to a botched medical procedure was recognized recently by the Center for Justice and Democracy at the New York Law School for his work advocating for patients rights.

Herman Cole, whose wife, Sadie, spent 13 years in a coma before passing away last August, said his wife would have been proud to learn that his work had earned him the Medal of Justice Award from the Center for Justice and Democracy, a consumer rights organization.

"She's probably up there in heaven saying, 'I'm glad he's standing up for me. He stood up for my rights 'til death do us part,'" Cole said.

Sadie Cole suffered a catastrophic brain injury following a routine procedure at Norwalk Hospital in July 1998. She suffered an acute loss of oxygen to her brain during her elective tubal ligation surgery, leaving her in a permanent vegetative state and prompting a bitter legal battle between the hospital and the Cole family.

The family successfully sued Norwalk Hospital and Dr. Jay Angeluzzi, the anesthesiologist who oversaw Cole's surgery, for \$12 million. The lawsuit was settled in 2004.

Since his wife suffered the traumatic brain injury, Cole has spoken to Congress on behalf of the victims of medical malpractice and their families. He has been a vocal opponent of a federal effort to put a cap on medical malpractice lawsuit awards and limit the contingency fees of lawyers.

Cole said he was especially offended by the proposed contingency fee cap, as personal injury lawyers need a vast amount of resources to face off against an institution with unlimited funds like a hospital. He said he was lucky enough to find a lawyer -- **Richard A. Silver** of the Stamford-based firm **Silver Golub & Teitell** -- who put up his own money to fight the hospital.

"If you've gone through what I've gone through, you'd see it takes money to get answers," he said.

Cole also lobbied to have Angeluzzi's license revoked but before any action was taken against Angeluzzi, another patient under his care in 2003, Mia House, also suffered a traumatic brain injury. House was in a coma for nine years before dying in April 2012. Angeluzzi's license was revoked soon after.

Joanne Doroshow, executive director of the CJ&D, said Cole was selected to receive the award, because he used a very difficult situation to advocate for change.

"His story stood out as moving and inspirational," said Doroshow. "He turned his grief into a positive effort."