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Aetna Reels In Wake of \$116 Million Verdict

Teresa Goodrich, widow of San Bernardino County District Attorney David Goodrich who died of a rare stomach cancer in 1995, brought suit against the Hartford Conn. insurance giant Aetna U.S. Healthcare. On Wednesday, January 20, 1999, the jury awarded the widow \$116 million in punitive-damages coupled with a \$4.5 million damages leaving Aetna and the insurance industry gasping for breath.

One juror cited the most damaging piece of evidence "was the health plan hand-book. Nowhere in 20 pages was there a single mention of experimental treatment. Yet all of the letters of denial&were based on that."

Which brings attention to the managed care industries biggest problem: how to manage the need of desperately ill patients seeking experimental un-proven medical treatment, who have no other options?

In addition to the healthcare industry's looming debate on experimental treatments, the verdict is sure to inflame the debate already in Congress as to whether or not patients have the right to sue their HMO- most of which currently do not.