

December 28, 1999

## **Michael J. Bidart Named Top Lawyer of the Year California Lawyer Magazine Cites \$120.5 Million Verdict Against Aetna**

Consumer attorney Michael J. Bidart has been named one of California's Top Lawyers of the Year for 1999 for a landmark jury verdict that helped to reform the managed care industry.

Bidart, a partner with the Claremont firm of Shernoff, Bidart, Darras & Dillon, won a \$120.5 million verdict against Aetna U.S. Healthcare of California on behalf of a cancer patient who died while trying to get a bone marrow transplant that the health plan's own physicians had approved. The verdict is the largest ever rendered against an HMO and was used to push for major legislative reforms regulating HMOs both in California and across the country [Goodrich v. Aetna, RCV020499].

An expert in insurance bad faith litigation on behalf of consumers, Bidart tried the high-profile case alone against Aetna's team of corporate and outside lawyers, producing 2000 pages of written discovery and attending 76 depositions over the 3 ½ years of litigation. After a 2 ½ month long trial, Bidart persuaded the jury that Aetna was guilty of malice, fraud, and oppression. David Goodrich's widow was awarded damages of more than \$700,000 for unpaid medical bills, \$3.8 million for loss of companionship, and \$116 million in punitive damages.

The landmark verdict and tragic details of the Goodrich case helped to renew the debate on a Patients' Bill of Rights that would satisfy consumers, patient advocates, and health care providers. In September, Gov. Gray Davis signed a package of bills giving Californians broad new rights against managed care companies that include giving patients the right to sue their health insurer for punitive damages and to solicit outside reviews of decisions denying them coverage. The new legislation provides a way around a federal law that had prevented many such suits.

A native of Chino, Bidart leads the firm's HMO Litigation and Property and Casualty Departments. As counsel to policyholders, Bidart has won dozens of jury verdicts and settlements, including the recovery of more than \$300 million for victims of the 1994 Northridge earthquake. Bidart also represents more than a dozen families of Holocaust survivors and their heirs who are trying to collect on life insurance policies purchased prior to WWII.

Bidart is among 20 top attorneys recognized by California Lawyer Magazine for their outstanding contributions to the legal profession in 1999. Bidart also was a finalist for the Trial Lawyers for Public Justice 1999 Trial Lawyer of the Year Award.