

## **SUN SENTINEL, April 14, 1995**

### **Local**

#### **“District selfishly drags out boy’s case”**

**By Gary Stein**

Our friends at the North Broward Hospital District always knew how to throw public money around.

For years, they paid overwhelming salaries and benefits to district president Richard J. Stull III, who finally left last year at a time when his compensation package was reportedly worth well over \$00,000 a year.

His salary alone, supposedly the highest of any public official in Florida, was over \$300,000 yearly.

He also had car insurance. Car allowance. Hotsy-totsy club dues. You name it. All with the district’s blessing.

The hospital district board probably would have kept paying this money out, and more, if the public and media didn’t go ballistic.

This hospital district also once proposed an out-of-town meeting to discuss their budget – out-of-town to avoid public scrutiny.

When the public found out about this, and the possible \$25,000 tab for the meeting, the hospital district said, “oops.”

So yes spending money on salaries and perks was always a specialty for this group.

Which makes what they have done to Cynthia Mendat and her son Justin even more outrageous.

#### **Legal battles never end**

Justin Bates, 11; has been in Broward General Medical Center for 10 years, the result of a hospital error resulting in brain damage when he was being treated for an asthma attack.

Justin can’t speak, walk or sit up.

The legal and political and money battles since then have been well-documented.

The hospital couldn’t be held responsible for more than a \$200,000 claim unless the Legislature approved.

And for years, as Justin lay in the hospital and his mother anguished because she couldn't bring her son home without the money to get him proper care, the Legislature couldn't devote much time to this.

Of course, legislators had other pressing items, like deciding the official state pie and adding another vanity license plate and assuring gender equity in dry cleaning bills.

A Broward jury recommended \$8.6 million in 1990, which would have allowed Mendat to bring Justin home and have proper treatment. This week, a Legislative committee approved a settlement that amounts to approximately \$1 million as a lump sum and \$20,000 a month for Justin's care.

Outrageous.

Almost as outrageous as the North Broward Hospital District saying it wants the \$1.8 million Mendat was supposed to get from other medical professionals who admitted fault in Justin's case. The district slapped a lien on it, insisting that money should go toward Justin's hospital bill.

They want the \$1.8 million even though it was *their own* mistake.

This is the same North Broward Hospital District, that by the way, that reportedly has paid lawyers and lobbyist over \$750,000 just to fight this case.

### **Money is all that matters**

"I love (Justin) and I want him home," Cynthia Mendat told the media this week.

She said she will "keep fighting" this battle for a fairer settlement.

It is unconscionable that, after 10 years, she still can't bring Justin to their Coral Springs home and give her son constant love and round-the-clock nursing care in a non-hospital environment.

No amount of money – not even the original \$8.6 million jury award – can compensate for what this family has been put through, and what they still face.

But money is what this is all about.

And a North Broward Hospital District that picked the wrong time to finally be so concerned about being frugal.