

# BROWARD & STATE

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## Dancer gets \$2.15M in malpractice suit

■ A Broward jury made the award in a medical malpractice suit after finding a prominent surgeon, who has treated many famous athletes, at fault.

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At age 17, Katie Shreffler had been a ballerina for 15 years and was looking forward to more years of pliés and grand jetés, along with going to college.

Then she suffered pain in her hip, and underwent surgery.

Ten years later, the Coconut Creek woman is still in pain, walks with a crutch and has needed more surgery to correct the damage from the original procedure, according to Shreffler and her attorneys.

A Broward County jury agreed this week, awarding her \$2.15 million.

"I just feel like justice finally came through," said Shreffler, who is married now, with the last name Sanchez, and the mother of a 2-year-old daughter.

Lawyers for the doctor who performed the procedure and the hospital where it was done said they would appeal.

"This was a jury that was overcome by sympathy for Katie Shreffler, and did not fully understand



J. ALBERT DIAZ/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**WINS HER CASE:** One-time ballerina Katie Shreffler walks with a crutch now.

the issues," lawyer Bruce Montoya said.

Shreffler's attorneys argued that Dr. Marc Philippon performed an

•TURN TO SURGERY, 2B

### COCONUT CREEK

## Dancer awarded \$2.15 million

•SURGERY, FROM 1B

unnecessary surgery. They said Shreffler was among the first patients Philippon ever performed the procedure on, and he used the teen for practice.

### 'GUINEA PIG'

"He basically learned on the job, and my client was his guinea pig," attorney Scott Schlesinger said. "She paid the price for his current success."

Philippon's attorney disagreed. Lawyer Bruce Montoya said Shreffler's problems stemmed from an abnormal hip she was born with.

"Her deterioration was not due to surgery at all," Montoya said.

The jury also found liable Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, where Philippon was a doctor at the time. Schlesinger said the hospital should not have let Philippon do the procedure without further training in what, he said, was then a new technique.

The surgery, called hip

arthroscopy, took place on July 31, 1997, at Holy Cross. In such a procedure, the surgeon makes a small incision and inserts a camera to view the hip area. Another incision is then made for a device, such as a bone-shaver, to provide treatment.

Shreffler's attorneys said that, months later, another doctor discovered grinding in Shreffler's hip, which meant cartilage protecting the bones was torn up, leaving bone to rub against bone.

It appears that the doctor applied too much pressure on the bone-shaver, may have broken two shavers and damaged the cartilage while retrieving them, said attorney Crane Johnstone.

Again, the doctor's attorney argued the surgery was necessary and that it improved Shreffler's condition.

The suit also named the bone-shaver's manufacturer, which was not found liable.

On Monday, the jury awarded \$2.15 million to cover Shreffler's past suffering, future medical treatment and her inability to work.

Philippon was at Holy Cross until about five years ago, Montoya said. He took a position with the University of Pittsburgh's sports medicine division, but commuted back to Holy Cross for patients, Montoya said.

A few years ago he moved his practice to Vail, Colo.

### TREATS PRO ATHLETES

According to his clinic's website, Philippon is "one of the world's leading orthopaedic hip surgeons" and a consultant to all the major U.S. professional sports leagues. He has treated pro golfers Greg Norman and Peter Jacobsen, hockey player Mario Lemieux, pro football player Priest Holmes, and baseball player Louis Castillo, according to the site.

"I can tell you this verdict in no way reflects the quality of the physician Dr. Philippon is or his standard of care," Montoya said.

Shreffler never did go to college, where she had hoped to continue her dancing.

"It feels good . . . hearing he is responsible," Shreffler said.