

Record Damages Awarded in China AIDS Case

Reuters

BEIJING — A Chinese court has awarded the family of a woman who died from AIDS a record \$1.2 million after she was infected with tainted blood during a transfusion, official news organizations said Tuesday.

A state-run hospital in the central province of Hubei was ordered to give Chen Xiumei's husband Shen Jieyong and 3-year-old daughter, both of whom have tested positive for the AIDS virus, 205,000 yuan (\$25,000) and to pay them 90,104 yuan each annually, a total of up to 10 million yuan, the China Daily said.

The report did not say how many years the compensation would last, but said it would cease if a cure was found.

The Wuxian People's Court in the

eastern province of Jiangsu also ordered the hospital to pay 58,000 yuan to other relatives, the report said.

The newspaper reported that the family lawyer was worried the hospital would not be able to pay the full amount because of financial difficulties.

A hospital official said he had not yet heard details of the court verdict, but commented: "Our business is being seriously affected."

An official at the court declined to comment on the case.

Mrs. Chen and her husband had sued Nanzhang County hospital, which had given Mrs. Chen blood transfusions during childbirth. Mr. Shen and their newborn daughter tested positive for HIV, the AIDS virus, soon afterward.

The court said the hospital had collected and provided blood without state licenses and that it had given Mrs. Chen blood that had not been tested for HIV, the China Daily said.

Last month China admitted that it was facing a serious AIDS epidemic, with reported HIV infections surging 67.4 percent from a year earlier to 3,541 cases in the first half of 2001.

Although officials have said intravenous drug use led to about 70 percent of China's 26,058 reported HIV cases from 1985 to June this year, specialists have warned of unsafe blood supplies.

Eight out of every 1,000 HIV cases in China were due to unsafe blood collection and supply, according to a recent report by the state-run Xinhua press agency.