



Chip Wagar, Chopin, Wagar, Richard & Kutcher, LLP

Experienced. Compassionate. Professional.

Photographs by Stanwycks Photography

The consequences of medical malpractice on patients and their families can be as devastating and heartbreaking as negligent injury from car wrecks, job accidents or defective products. However, unlike most other forms of accidental injury or death, most victims of medical malpractice suffer permanent injury or even the death of a loved one in silence, never seeking compensation for their loss.

Thirty years have passed since Chip Wagar graduated cum laude from Tulane University School of Law. In those intervening years, he has tried over 100 civil trials and handled thousands of cases in the state and federal courts of Louisiana, Texas and the Gulf Coast region. In 2006, Chip was recognized by *CityBusiness* as one of “50 Leaders in Law” in the New Orleans area.

“But the truth is, over 225,000 deaths occur each year due to medical malpractice, making it the third leading cause of death in the United States.”

While no lawyer can guarantee results in any given case, Wagar brings years of experience combined with professional skill recognized time and again by his peers and the legal community to each and every medical malpractice case he handles. He combines a deep sensitivity for the often painful and tragic circumstances his clients face with professionalism, dedication and experience to help clients often grappling with a life-changing disability or the death of a family member.

Wagar explained that not every poor result from surgery or medical treatment results from malpractice, and, that most doctors, nurses and health care practitioners are gifted, caring individuals who do their very best for their patients. “Often clients simply want to know whether their fate was due to malpractice or not and, if not, to cope with their condition knowing, at least, that it was not due to their doctor or hospital,” Wagar said. “But the truth is, over 225,000 deaths occur each year due to medical malpractice, making it the third leading cause of death in the United States. In addition,

“There’s a sort of conventional wisdom in the legal community that defense and plaintiff practices don’t mix, but I’ve personally found that to be a myth, at least where medical malpractice is concerned.”

the Institute of Medicine estimates that fully half of all adverse reactions to medicines are the result of medical error and account for some 7,000 deaths annually.”

When medical malpractice occurs, it takes a special lawyer to handle such cases in litigation. That’s because special laws, particularly the Louisiana Medical Malpractice Act, give doctors, hospitals and other healthcare providers special privileges and protections against claims for malpractice. In addition, proving medical malpractice invariably requires retaining other experts in the medical field at great expense to screen cases and potentially testify in court. “Doctors and hospitals are defended in malpractice lawsuits by talented and experienced lawyers with great financial resources at their disposal,” Wagar added. Given the legal challenges medical malpractice claims present, it takes a special lawyer like Chip Wagar to handle these cases.

Wagar’s early legal career was spent with Exxon Corporation’s litigation section in New Orleans handling primarily maritime and products liability litigation. Since 1982, Chip Wagar has been in private practice. In 1996, he and several partners opened

Chopin, Wagar, Richard & Kutcher, LLP, at their present location in Lakeway II in Metairie. Chip has been the managing partner of the firm since 2004, which has twice been named by *CityBusiness* as one of the “Best Places to Work” for small businesses in the area. Currently, the firm has grown to nearly 20 lawyers and over 50 employees. The firm’s predominant practice areas include commercial, casualty and insurance litigation.

According to Wagar, “In my early career, I was focused mainly on the defense of admiralty and products liability litigation, which I still handle to this day. In recent years, though, my interest in medicine and personal injury led me into handling medical malpractice cases. The first couple of cases I handled came to me almost by random chance, and I was intrigued by the nuances of the law and the complex medical issues those cases involved. Those made me decide to expand my practice in this area. Since then, by word of mouth or referrals by clients, my practice has grown.”

While the firm on the whole continues to represent mainly corporate clients, Chip has not found this to be an obstacle to his

growing caseload in medical malpractice. “There’s a sort of conventional wisdom in the legal community that defense and plaintiff practices don’t mix, but I’ve personally found that to be a myth, at least where medical malpractice is concerned. It’s a whole separate area of the law that really doesn’t present conflicts with our clients involved in litigation in other areas that we practice. Furthermore, medical malpractice from the plaintiff’s side requires a lot of initial investment and staying power that many firms simply cannot afford. My firm can.”

Wagar’s key to success? – “If you love what you do, you’ll probably be pretty good at it because you’ll spend the time and give the attention to detail that is needed to excel. I’ve come to love medical malpractice work as much as anything else I do and the satisfaction of helping people who have suffered so much grief goes beyond the financial rewards, as most plaintiff attorneys will tell you.” ▶

The office of Chopin, Wagar, Richard & Kutcher, LLP, is located at 3850 N Causeway Blvd. #900 in Metairie. For more information, call Chip Wagar at 504-830-3838 or go online www.chopin.com.

