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## Doctors cleared of negligence in Ritter's death

### Jury also finds that radiologist had advised late actor to seek treatment

**AP** Associated Press

updated 1:16 p.m. PT, Fri., March. 14, 2008

GLENDALE, Calif. - A jury cleared a cardiologist and a radiologist Friday of negligence in the diagnosis and treatment of actor John Ritter, who died of a torn aorta in 2003.

Jurors found that the radiologist advised Ritter to follow up with treatment by a physician after a body scan two years before his death. Ritter didn't follow the order.

The lawsuit was brought by Ritter's widow and children. The 9-3 verdict means there is no damage judgment against the doctors.

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**Doctors cleared John Ritter case**

March 14: A jury clears two doctors of negligence in the diagnosis and treatment of actor John Ritter, who died of a torn aorta in 2003. NBC's Jinah Kim reports. MSNBC

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Radiologist Matthew Lotysch testified he told Ritter he had calcification in three coronary arteries and should consult other doctors. But in a related finding, the jury decided that Ritter's failure to pursue that medical consultation was not a cause of his death.

The cardiologist cleared, Dr. Joseph Lee, was summoned to treat Ritter at Providence St. Joseph Medical Center, where he was diagnosed with a heart attack.

When he died on Sept. 11, 2003, Ritter was starring in the TV show "8 Simple Rules ... for Dating My Teenage Daughter." He was 54.

Lawyers for Ritter's widow, Amy Yasbeck, and children claimed Ritter's death resulted in a loss of as much as \$67 million in future earnings. Eight other medical personnel and the hospital previously made settlements with the family totaling \$14 million.

During the trial, attorneys for the family sought to show that Lee rushed to a faulty diagnosis and failed to have a chest X-ray taken that would have revealed the torn aorta, resulting in surgery that would have saved him.

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Testimony showed that an X-ray was ordered as soon as Ritter arrived at the emergency room but for unknown reasons it was never done. Lee was called in later in the evening after Ritter was already diagnosed with a heart attack.

Defense testimony characterized the aortic dissection as lethal and contended that even with surgery the outcome would have been the same.

Attorney Stephen C. Fraser, who represented Lotysch, credited jurors with being sophisticated and intelligent.

"The system worked and we're very, very happy that they did the right thing," Fraser said.

The family's attorney, Michael Plonsker, stood by the wrongful death lawsuit's claims.

"We are still convinced these doctors did something inappropriate but the jury system worked," he said.

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