

# Meet Louisiana's Medical Malpractice Pioneer

John Hammons was fresh out of law school in the late 1970s when two clients approached him needing representation in medical malpractice cases. At the time, he did not practice in that area, but he felt led to undertake the challenge.

"I took the cases because I felt strongly that they deserved representation," Hammons recalls. Both cases resolved favorably, and attorneys from across the state began referring medical malpractice cases to him. "I wasn't an expert, but I had done two more successful cases than virtually anyone else in Louisiana," he says.

Within three years, Hammons' caseload was substantial enough for him to focus exclusively on medical malpractice law. Forty-five years later, he still feels "thankful, blessed, and excited" to do this work every day.

## Higher Calling

For Hammons, practicing medical malpractice is more than just a job; it's a ministry. "Injured patients are incredibly vulnerable and outgunned against the Louisiana health care legal system," he says. "Someone has to stand up for them, and I believe God has called me to do this work."

However noble, the path is not easy. Louisiana medical legislation offers significantly more protection for the medical communities than other states. Regardless of the severity of a patient's injury, general damages can never exceed \$500,000. "Under these statutes, none of my clients can ever be fairly compensated, but it's worth exposing



“ Injured patients are incredibly vulnerable. Someone has to stand up for them when they're wronged. ”

**John L. Hammons**

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the truth and influencing statutes going forward," Hammons says.

Such was the case when a patient with hypertension died from a stroke after a root canal because the dentist did not monitor his post-operative blood pressure. Hammons' work led to the implementation of new post-operative monitoring standards in the Louisiana dental community.

In another case, Hammons was suspicious of a hospital's documentation that claimed that a fluke heart attack caused a woman's death following a triple bypass surgery. He fought to exhume the body for an autopsy—which revealed that the surgical team had cut a major artery at the beginning of surgery and the

woman had actually bled to death within minutes.

Hammons has taken hundreds of cases like these. Each one, he says, has been worth the challenge: "It's an uphill battle because our media portrays the medical community as heroes—which, usually, they are—so it's hard to convince a jury when a doctor is at fault for unacceptable care."

Ironically, he notes, his closest friends are doctors: "When I first started, I actually received threats from the medical community, but I've built a good reputation over the years by never pursuing a case that didn't have sound medical and scientific evidence."



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