

Funding a watchdog at foundation

A \$1 million grant from lawyers who won a settlement against Medtronic will help track the performance of heart devices.

By JANET MOORE, Star Tribune

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Lawyers who won a \$114 million settlement last year on behalf of thousands of patients who had potentially faulty heart defibrillators made by Medtronic Inc. have given \$1 million to a Minneapolis foundation that has done groundbreaking work tracking the safety of cardiac devices.

A check will be presented to the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation at Abbott Northwestern Hospital on Monday. The funds will be used to further develop the foundation's Multi-Center Registry, which collects safety data about defibrillators and pacemakers from six hospitals across the country.

The registry is the brainchild of Dr. Robert Hauser, a prominent cardiologist at the foundation who, along with a colleague, Dr. Barry Maron, went public in 2005 after the

death of a patient who had a defibrillator made by Guidant Corp.

The ensuing furor led to the recall of thousands of heart devices made by Guidant, now part of Boston Scientific Corp., and raised questions about how federal regulators track faulty devices.

It also led to a massive legal case in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis filed by aggrieved patients against Fridley-based Medtronic, which resulted in the \$114 million settlement.

The settlement included \$18.5 million in attorneys' fees.

The plaintiffs' litigation team was led by Daniel Gustafson, of Gustafson Gluek, and Charles Zimmerman, of Zimmerman Reed, both of which are based in the Twin Cities.

"The work of Dr. Hauser, along with Dr. Maron, was so heroic, and it took so much courage for them to come forward and take the heat," said Randy Hopper, an attorney with Zimmerman Reed.

James Toscano, president of the foundation's board, said the court-approved grant will support independent research that "is not influenced by the support we receive from donors."

The foundation also receives grant money from heart device makers Medtronic, Boston Scientific and St. Jude Medical Inc.

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