



# Patient Attorney

**M**ark Hiepler strikes fear in the hearts of HMO administrators and defense attorneys. Cigna Health Corp., United Health and Metropolitan Life — to name a few — have surrendered seven-figure settlements or verdicts to the Oxnard-based plaintiffs' lawyer for failure or refusal to treat patients in need of health care.

Beyond possessing legal acumen and the skills needed to succeed in court, Hiepler operates on conviction — an intangible quality that truly sets him apart. "If you believe in what you do, you'll have the stamina to outlast the competition," says the 38-year-old attorney.

Lawyers at Hiepler & Hiepler — which he heads, along with his wife Michelle and partner James McGinley — believe that people are entitled to adequate health care from their providers; it's a matter of patients' rights, Hiepler insists.

That belief is buttressed by the harrowing death of Mark Hiepler's sister, Nelene Fox, who died from breast cancer in 1993. Diagnosed in 1991, Fox underwent two mastectomies and chemotherapy, until her only chance of survival was a bone marrow transplant. Her insurance provider, Health Net, refused to pay for the transplant — until it was too late.

The Hieplers' \$89.3 million jury verdict against Health Net, in 1994, rocked the health-care industry. "Within 48 hours, insurance companies were buzzing, and health plans started revising their internal review protocols," Hiepler says.

Today, the firm is known not only for avenging such losses, but also for providing each client with 40 hours of free, self-help advice on how to get treatment approved by stubborn HMOs.

"We get to know our clients and they become part of our family," says Hiepler. "They know I've sat in the waiting room at the doctor's office and received bad news."

— Jeffrey Anderson