

Baidu, hospital sued over ad after woman's death



Edward Hospital in Urumqi [File Photo]

Baidu is facing fresh accusations of publishing misleading advertising after the death of a woman who had surgery at a hospital she found using the tech giant's search engine.

Zhang Rui, 27, fell from the window of her apartment in September less than a month after undergoing an operation on her nose at Urumqi Edward Hospital, a private hospital in the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

She had visited the clinic after a search on Baidu ranked it at the top of a list of hospitals that excel in treating nasal conditions, according to her fiancé, Yang Weifang.

The woman's parents have filed a lawsuit against both the hospital and Baidu with a district court in Urumqi, and are demanding 674,000 yuan (\$98,000) in compensation.

Hong Li, the attorney representing the family, said a lawyer acting for the hospital contacted him on Wednesday, hoping to reach a settlement, but that they "are not interested in reconciliation and will continue with the lawsuit."

Zhang visited Edward Hospital on Aug. 27, experiencing sinus problems and hoping to be treated before her wedding day. She was diagnosed with rhinitis and underwent surgery on her nose that day.

However, Yang said his fiancée experienced acute pain and nosebleeds, and was unable to sleep for three days after the operation.

Hong said she became depressed and anxious, adding that on Sept. 13, she went to Urumqi Fourth People's Hospital and was diagnosed with a psychological disorder.

Two days later, she died after falling from a window of her apartment in Urumqi, with her family suspecting that she may have killed herself.

Hong said Edward Hospital had failed to properly diagnose and treat Zhang, and did not provide remedies for the side effects she experienced from the surgery, which ultimately led to her death.

Baidu is also liable, as its search engine provided the information that resulted in Zhang visiting the hospital, Hong added.

An employee at the hospital's administrative office declined to comment on the case.

Zhu Wei, a law researcher at the China University of Political Science and Law, said paid online search services are classified as advertising in China, and service providers such as Baidu should clearly label any paid listings.

According to screen grabs provided by Hong, Edward Hospital was marked with the Chinese character for "advertisement" in the search results.

However, the attorney added, search engines are also required to inspect the certificates of their advertisers and are prohibited from providing false information in search results under Chinese law.

Zhang's case comes nearly a year after Baidu faced similar accusations over its ad policies from the parents of Wei Zexi, a computer science student in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, who died of cancer after undergoing a controversial "immune therapy" in Beijing that he found using the search engine.