

Kathleen Mary Skrypek Bucci, who persuaded a federal judge in 1991 to order her health insurer to pay for a special high-risk treatment for cancer, died Tuesday at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in Torrington. Mrs. Bucci was 48 and died of pneumonia while being treated for cancer, her husband, Donald A. Bucci, said. Two years ago, with an advanced case of breast cancer, Mrs. Bucci asked a federal court to order Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Connecticut to pay for a bone-marrow transplant that her doctors and family believed was her only chance for a cure. Blue Cross argued that the treatment was experimental and therefore not covered in its policies. However, the judge in the case ruled that too many other insurance companies pay for the treatment for it to be considered experimental. The expensive procedure included high doses of chemotherapy that carry a 20 percent chance of death. Mrs. Bucci's attorney, Peter Mlynarczyk of New Britain, said it was the first case in the state challenging the classification of bone-marrow transplants in the treatment of breast cancer as experimental or investigational. Such cases are being brought before judges throughout the country, and the Bucci case is being used as a precedent, said Mlynarczyk, who added that he has been involved in 53 other cases since hers. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. Mlynarczyk said it occurs in one of every nine women, and one in 20 die of it. Mrs. Bucci was diagnosed with cancer in 1988 and her doctor recommended the transplant after conventional treatment failed, the cancer having spread to her spinal column. Mrs. Bucci received the treatment at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha in March 1991. Her illness was in remission for about 11 months, and her condition was improved until December 1992, Donald Bucci said. He said his wife was courageous and upbeat throughout the legal proceedings and her treatment. "Kathleen was a very positive individual," Donald Bucci said. On Dec. 17, she was admitted to Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and was briefly treated with taxol, a drug recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Mrs. Bucci was born and raised in New Britain. She attended local schools and graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas High School. She attended Hartford College for Women and worked for more than 30 years as a legal secretary, the past 15 for the firm of Erikson, Scalise, Mangan and Zembko in New Britain. She was widely known in the legal community, her husband said, and was a member of the New Britain and Hartford County Legal Secretaries associations. In addition to her husband, she leaves a daughter and son-in-law, Corrine Bucci and Kevin J. Albert of Bristol; and a granddaughter. Her parents, Joseph and Helen Cop Skrypek, are deceased. Calling hours will be Friday, from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m., at Porter's Funeral Home, 111 Chamberlain Highway, Kensington. The funeral service Saturday will begin at 10 a.m. at the funeral home. A Mass will be celebrated at St. Jerome Church, New Britain, at 10:45 a.m. The family requests that memorial donations be made to the St. Thomas Aquinas Development Fund, 74 Kelsey St., New Britain 06051. Copyright 1993 The Hartford Courant Co.