

AVIATION LITIGATOR WITH MEDICAL DEGREE TAKES CASE FROM PHONE CALL TO \$9.6M VERDICT

JD/MD Attorney Sanjiv N. Singh Believed in Montreal Convention Stroke Case Against American Airlines From Day One Despite American's Dismissive Denials And Shifting of Blame

SAN JOSE, CA – When Sanjiv N. Singh, JD, MD was first contacted in 2022 by Jesus' Plasencia's family about his devastating stroke aboard an American Airlines flight, Singh immediately believed the airline had failed its passengers. But American Airlines' attorneys began dismissing the case from the moment they first spoke with Singh. They ultimately pontificated on the Montreal Convention, claimed it was the passenger's responsibility to have deplaned, and dismissed the medicine behind the horrible outcome as inevitable and beyond their control. Any doctor listening to their explanation would have scratched their head—but that was the problem. "American Airlines lawyers were brushing it off," Singh recalls. One of the few aviation and catastrophic loss attorneys in the country with a medical degree and extensive clinical experience (including working on the front lines of an emergency room during the outbreak of the 2020 COVID pandemic), Singh saw what others missed. Three years later, his unwavering belief in the case set the stage for the groundbreaking \$9.6 million verdict that will be a landmark for passenger safety and passenger rights.

"American's attorneys were quite smug from the outset," Singh explains. "But when I heard the family's story, my medical training and litigator instincts immediately told me this wasn't just a tragic medical event—this was a case about a number of egregious failures by the airline, each representing a distinct legal opportunity under international law."

The Attorney With an MD Who Saw the Breakthrough

Singh's unique background with a JD/MD and 28 years as a practicing attorney positioned him to recognize the value of the case and develop it. As one of the earliest attorneys to sue Boeing for the 737 Max crashes and co-lead counsel who settled 57 claims against Boeing for the Lion Air Flight JT610 crash—work featured prominently in the bestselling book *Flying Blind*—Singh has become one of the nation's prominent aviation safety advocates.

But it was his medical degree that unlocked the Plasencia case.

"The moment I understood the timeline—the initial TIA or transient ischemic attack at the gate, followed by the major stroke during flight—I knew we had something profound and shocking," Singh recalls. "After I deposed the pilot and got him to make some critical admissions about events that occurred 1.5 hours into the flight, we knew it wasn't one instance of misconduct, but in fact two separate instances—one at the gate and one inflight. There were two separate opportunities for American Airlines to save Mr. Plasencia from being 24/7 nursing-care dependent, and they failed both times."

After personally deposing the pilot in the case, Singh identified that in fact there were likely two so called “accidents” under the Montreal Convention: the airline’s failure to properly respond to the transient ischemic attack while still at the Miami gate, and their subsequent failure to divert the transatlantic flight to numerous possible destinations with a stroke center when Plasencia suffered a major stroke.

Putting Together A Dream Team

From the outset, Singh suspected American would be reluctant to settle given what was at stake. “American Airlines has grown accustomed to stretching the boundaries for evading passenger rights claims,” Singh explains, adding, “My experience taking on mega corporations told me we needed an outstanding trial team, so I reached out to Burns Charest in Texas whom I knew through my recent work on the criminal aspects of the Boeing case. I knew the American Airlines case could be transformative if we executed it properly, and a rockstar team was essential.” The strategic partnership proved extraordinary. Singh worked in collaboration with Burns Charest from 2023 through trial, working alongside Burns Charest’s exceptional trial attorneys Darren Nicholson, a Burns Charest partner, and Hannah Crowe. During trial, Mr. Nicholson summed up American’s conduct in closing: “Personal responsibility, personal responsibility, personal responsibility. How many times did we hear that? Did you hear one word about corporate responsibility? Doesn’t responsibility go both ways? What you’ve just seen is company policy. This is how this company operates. Never admit you are wrong, never admit liability, don’t you dare put it in writing.” (Quoted verbatim from Mr. Nicholson’s closing argument.)

The Landmark Verdict

On Wednesday, September 17, 2025, after a rapid, witness packed 6 day trial, a San Jose federal jury found American Airlines violated Montreal Convention obligations by:

- Failing to consult medical personnel after observing stroke symptoms at the gate;
- Clearing the passenger for takeoff despite clear neurological warning signs;
- Refusing to divert the eight-hour transatlantic flight when additional stroke symptoms appeared; and
- Ignoring the airline’s own established emergency medical protocols.

The \$9.6 million award establishes new precedent that airlines cannot prioritize schedules over passenger safety during international medical emergencies.

Looking Forward: A New Legal Framework

“We believe this will be a landmark decision for passenger rights under the Montreal Convention,” Singh concluded. “When passengers trust airlines with their lives on international flights, that trust comes with the legal obligations to follow their own safety protocols. This verdict, which will largely pay for Mr. Plasencia’s 24/7 care for the rest of his life, makes that clear.”

Past results do not guarantee future outcomes. This release is for informational purposes and does not constitute legal advice.

CASE INFORMATION

Northern District of California, San Jose Division

Tavantzis et al. v. American Airlines, Inc.

Case No: 5:23-cv-05607-NW

For more than twenty eight years, Sanjiv N. Singh has advocated for individual and corporate

clients across the globe in a wide range of matters, emphasizing advocacy for individuals, families, and corporations who have suffered catastrophic losses including wildfires, property loss, wrongful death, aviation disasters. Current cases include multiple clients with losses in connection with the historic 2025 Altadena or so called Eaton Fire alleged to have been caused by Southern California Edison, and high profile wrongful death cases against San Mateo County, PG&E, County of Marin and The Boeing Company.

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Distributed by Law Firm Newswire

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