

UMDNJ manager says he was demoted for whistle blowing

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NEWARK, N.J. (AP) - A financial manager at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey says in a lawsuit that his efforts as a whistleblower at the school got him harassed, demoted, less pay, an office in the lunchroom and an escort out by armed police.

In the lawsuit, **Michael Nappe**, of Piscataway, said that for four years he repeatedly tried to report to university officials what he claims were the medical school's illegal and unethical billing and accounting practices.

"This is a man who has repeatedly objected to waste, mismanagement and fraud over four years," said Nappe's attorney, Steven Siegler. "At every turn, he's been beaten down by management."

Siegler said his client has been cooperating with the federal authorities for months.

School spokeswoman Anna Farneski declined to comment on the case, which was first reported by The Star-Ledger of Newark in Wednesday's newspapers.

"We don't comment on pending lawsuits," she said.

The claims are the latest to hit the scandal-plagued school, which has been under scrutiny amid an investigation into alleged Medicare and Medicaid fraud. Recent reports by a federal monitor said the school illegally billed nearly \$36 million in Medicare and Medicaid services and paid \$5.7 million to doctors since 2002 for illegal referrals.

"Each time he tried to discuss them with his supervisors, they scolded him, telling him he was 'not the police' and that the bills had already been approved," the suit states.

Nappe said he suffered severe physical symptoms from excessive stress and anxiety and went on medical leave this July. When he returned in October, he said his duties now consisted primarily of "busy work."

He said he alerted the federal monitor investigating fraud at the state medical school about an accounting scheme to cover up millions of dollars in overpayment of bills.

In a July report about billing irregularities, monitor Herbert J. Stern said UMDNJ paid \$35.2 million for telecommunications services, but the school had only approved spending \$5.9 million.

In his lawsuit, Nappe said that despite excellent performance reviews, he was retaliated against by being passed over for jobs, forced to cancel vacations and refused several promised raises.

Nappe, 55, is on administrative leave and declined to comment about the lawsuit, which was filed this month in Middlesex County Superior Court and seeks compensatory and punitive damages, attorney fees and other costs related to the suit.

The lawsuit claims he tried to report irregularities in the university's business dealings with several suppliers of telecommunications and computer support services, which were receiving "large sums of money without supporting documents."

The suit states the technology department in which he worked overcharged other university departments using dummy invoices and by adding markups for pagers and long-distance service.

Nappe said he reported the information to the university's office of corporate compliance over several years but no action was ever taken.

He also questioned superiors after he found out the department was paying invoices for hundreds of thousands of dollars without proper supporting documents, the suit says. As he began noticing more discrepancies, he tried to report them.