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EXCLUSIVE

Flushing Hospital nurse gets \$15 million award in sexual harassment suit

BY NICOLE BODE
 DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Monday, February 23rd 2009, 12:18 AM

A [Queens](#) jury awarded a nurse a record \$15 million after finding that hospital bosses allowed a doctor with a history of sex harassment to abuse female staffers for eight years.

Nurse [Janet Bianco](#), 55, who brought the suit, said she suffered prolonged torment at the hands of [Dr. Matthew Miller](#), ending when he sexually assaulted her at [Flushing Hospital](#) in 2001.

"Everybody knew it was an atmosphere of dirty jokes in the hallways and at the nursing station, [but] no one did anything about it. It was tolerated," Bianco, who left the hospital in 2005, told the Daily News.

"[Miller] was very bold, aggressive, he didn't even try to hide it. Patient rooms, hallways, it didn't matter. Wherever he was, it occurred. And I wasn't the only one."

Bianco said Miller - a 61-year-old married father who split time between the hospital and his private practice - turned Flushing Hospital into a pickup zone, rife with gratuitous sex talk and propositions to her and other nurses.

According to her lawsuit, Bianco repeatedly complained to supervisors about Miller's come-ons and unwanted touching, which escalated from the time she joined the hospital in 1993 until a pair of violent attacks in 2001.

The [Queens Supreme Court](#) jury ordered the hospital and Miller to each pay half of the massive \$15 million judgment - which Bianco's lawyer said is [New York's](#) largest-ever sex harassment award to an individual.

The hospital plans to appeal the decision.

In one case, Miller forcibly grabbed Bianco at a cardiac unit nursing station and tried to force his tongue down her throat, according to the lawsuit. The hospital's medical director, [Dr. Peter Barra](#), saw the attack but did nothing to intervene or discipline the out-of-control doctor, the lawsuit says.

Then, on Sept. 7, 2001, Miller chased Bianco through the halls until he cornered her in a room with two heavily sedated patients, where he aggressively groped her below the waist.

Miller was not sanctioned until Bianco lodged a written complaint, even though he had a history of sex-related professional violations.

In 1996, he was charged with having a two-year sexual relationship with a troubled, alcoholic female patient for whom he was prescribing anti-anxiety drugs, according to the state's [Office of Professional Medical Conduct](#).

Citing his "moral unfitness to practice medicine," the board sanctioned Miller with three

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years' probation, during which he was allowed to continue working at Flushing Hospital. Following Miller's attack on Bianco, the misconduct board suspended his license for two months and slapped him with another three years' probation. Miller's admitting privileges at Flushing Hospital were then yanked. Miller did not return repeated calls for comment. Flushing Hospital issued a statement claiming administrators "acted properly."

"People are sick of top-level officials in companies or organizations that see improper conduct and do nothing about it," said Bianco's lawyer Rick Ostrove, of the firm Leeds Morelli & Brown.

"I think the jury's sending a clear message that if you're in a position of power in our society, if you see improper conduct, we expect you to correct it or report it."

Bianco said she was stunned Miller was allowed to keep his license - and said she just wants to warn others so the same thing won't happen to them.

"I only hope out of this whole thing is that people become aware. I think that people take it lightly when you say sexual harassment. They don't understand how it affects your life, not only in your job, but in your home, with your friends," Bianco said.

"I don't think people understand how truly horrible it is."

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native ny'r

5:15:50 AM Feb 23, 2009 This RN deserves every penny. She is very courageous for coming forward and getting this out into the open in order to prevent it from happening to others. Thank you. This guy sounds like a real narcissitic fool. The administrators acted anything but improperly. Nurses are professionals who command respect in their work, not to be treated with any behavior other than professionalism. The Office of Medical Misconduct should suspend this ****'s license for at least a year and give him mandatory courses to surpress his physical urges. If he does this to professionals, can you imagine what he's doing to his patients who he clearly has a history of sedating?



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5:18:42 AM
Feb 23, 2009 I meant to say the administrators acted anyway but properly. I hope they lose on appeal.

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beep

7:13:13 AM
Feb 23, 2009 This doctor is one who was caught. The practice of sexual abuse by doctors in hospitals is much more widespread than we can ever imagine. I have several friends who are nurses and they tell sexual horror stories of their "relationships" with hospital doctors over many years. Often the docs activity is hard to prove, so I am delighted that this one has been uncovered.

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cujo

8:08:34 AM
Feb 23, 2009 \$15 million? Imagine if there was serious physical contact. She'd be getting \$100 million. This is absurd. While numerous people should be fired and this doctor's license stripped for a decade, the verdict is out of control and, of course, guess who will pay for it?

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nursecarol

9:27:24 AM
Feb 23, 2009 I've been in the same situation as this RN, when I was sexual harassed by Dr. Ibrahim at Downstate. For some ridiculous reason, women do not stick together when this occur. I'm glad that this RN was able to fight alone and win. They usually want tons of witnesses which is very hard. We need to stop treating doctors like Kings, and realize that the same rules apply. Wrong is wrong.

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NMI1212

11:11:07 AM
Feb 23, 2009 I'm glad she came forward. Think about all of the other nurses that had to suffer such abuse, because they were afraid of losing their jobs or being labeled a trouble maker. I would have done the same thing. Someone have to stand up. Also, just to make a leap a bit. Maybe he was a talented doctor, or his boss was inept. Look at Dr. House, of the TV show House. He is rude, obnoxious and very condescending. His boss is totally inept and takes her frustrations out on his underlings. Maybe she should be sued and then fired. I can't wait for that episode.

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marbing55

11:17:03 AM
Feb 23, 2009 My wife actually works in this hospital. It's stupid that in this day and age you still have doctors that behave like they're teenagers undergoing hormonal changes. Way out of control. I hope the state does something with this and revoke this doctor's license.

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Anntelope

10:25:21 AM
Mar 5, 2009 I always says this and people tell me I'm unreasonable but it is my opinion that this same problem exists within the police department and very badly too. It's almost impossible to be a good cop because sooner or later you ARE going to witness police brutality and if you don't report it you are part of the problem. Do I need to add anything else to that? I feel sorry for any cops who really want to be nice. It must be a difficult life for them.

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