

News

12 nurses accuse UMDNJ of forcing them to assist in abortion cases despite religious and moral objections

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By [Seth Augenstein](#) | [NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)



Jennifer Brown/The Star-

Ledger Twelve nurses at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey filed a lawsuit claiming the hospital required them to undergo training that involved assisting in abortions. They gathered Monday for a press conference outside the hospital administration building in Newark.

NEWARK — Standing on the steps of the school's administration building, 12 nurses today accused the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey of abruptly forcing them to assist in abortion cases, despite religious and moral objections to the procedures.

"In October, we were suddenly confronted with a choice between our faith and our jobs," said Fe Esperanza-Racpan Vinoya, one of the suing University Hospital nurses. "They said very clearly if we did not assist, we would face termination."

UMDNJ denies that nurses have been asked to take any direct involvement in abortions or to even be in the room at the time of abortion procedures if they have cultural, ethical or religious objections. The 12 nurses are all objecting on religious grounds, their attorney said.

"The University is in full compliance with all applicable state and federal laws and is confident its position will be vindicated when the court gives this matter a full hearing," the school said in a statement.

Twelve of the 16 nurses in the hospital's same-day surgery unit are part of the suit, according to their attorneys, one of whom is from the Arizona-based Christian non-profit Alliance Defense Fund.

The lawsuit asks the court to prevent the school from forcing "health care personnel to assist in abortions or in any health service related to abortion." It does not specify exactly what the nurses were asked to assist on. The suit, filed Oct. 31, also asks that millions in federal funding be withheld because, it contends, the university recently changed policy on whether nurses must assist in abortions.

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"The law said they don't have to assist any part of the (abortion) case," said Matt

Bowman, the attorney with the Alliance Defense Fund.

Demetrios Stratis, a Fair Lawn attorney who's the local counsel, said the definition of what constitutes assisting in an abortion could be very fine.



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Ledger

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The nurses would be assisting with the abortion even if they were taking down name, holding a patient's hand during the procedure, or walking them to the door.

"If they did that, they'd be helping to make it happen," said Stratis. "They're doing much more than that, obviously."

A federal judge granted a temporary restraining order on Nov. 3 stopping all the training, procedures and performances related to abortions for the suing nurses.

As many as 16 first- and second-trimester abortions are performed in University Hospital on Fridays, Vinoya said. She recounts that a nurse manager told one of the nurses opposed to being a part of the abortion procedure to lend a direct hand after an abortion within the last month.

"The nurse manager said, 'You just have to catch the baby's head. Don't worry, it's already dead,'" Vinoya recalled.

Rep. Christopher Smith (R-4th Dist.), called the complainants "courageous nurses of conscience." He called the lawsuit "perplexing," adding he was confident the nurses

were within their rights to object to the procedures.

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"This is an airtight case – which makes it so baffling," the congressman said.

Most of the nurses object to abortion on a variety of religious grounds, according to Bowman. Vinoya is a member of The Life Christian Church in West Orange, for example. Beryl Otieno Ngoje, a nurse and a Seventh-Day Adventist, said she objects to the new responsibilities as a matter of faith - and professional ethics.

"I'm a nurse to heal and help - not to destroy," Ngoje said.

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