

# Stockton attorney part of \$168M victory

By Zachary K. Johnson  
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STOCKTON — A Stockton attorney was part of the legal team representing a woman awarded a \$168 million jury verdict Wednesday in a case against one of the region's largest health care providers.

In the lawsuit, a former employee of the cardiac-surgery facility at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento said she had been sexually harassed, denied lunch breaks and eventually fired in retaliation for making complaints about these issues and threats to patient safety. Hospital officials said they plan to appeal the verdict.

"I hope this sends a message to Catholic Healthcare West that they need to clean up their working environment, stop the sexual harassment, address the safety concerns and treat both their employees and patients with dignity," said Gregory R. Davenport, 48, a Stockton attorney and Lodi resident representing the plaintiff.

In January, Catholic Healthcare West changed its name to Dignity Health, which is the umbrella organization that also includes St. Joseph's Medical Center and St. Joseph's Behavioral Health Center in Stockton and Mark Twain St. Joseph's Hospital in Calaveras County.

"We are disappointed by the jury's decision," wrote Mercy Hospital President Denny Powell. "We are committed to providing a safe working environment, free from sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior, which is backed by strong policies and practices to protect our employees. Any complaint is thoroughly investigated and prompt action is taken. We do not believe that the facts support this verdict or judgment. We stand by the actions we took in ending our relationship with this former employee and we will appeal this decision."

The employee is Ani Chourprian, a Yale graduate and physician's assistant whose role included performing technical functions — such as vein harvesting and sternum retraction — to assist heart surgeons in the operating room. She was concerned that the lack of lunch breaks affected her performance, according to court documents filed by Davenport and Sacramento attorneys Lawrence Bohm and Erika Gaspar. In addition, she filed 16 written complaints about issues ranging from unsafe surgical conditions to bullying to mismanaged care during surgery, according to the documents.

The \$168 million verdict included money for lost and future wages, stress and suffering as well as punitive damages.

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