

Mount Sinai lawsuit spurs NYC to tackle discrimination in healthcare institutions

After a group of Mount Sinai employees sued for sex, age and race discrimination, New York's City Council will vote this week to address racial and gender-based discrimination across all NYC healthcare institutions.

Since filing the lawsuit in 2019, the eight employees have received no apology or redress from Mount Sinai Health System. But they have been contacted by scores of women from across Mount Sinai and other New York hospitals reporting similar experiences of discrimination, mistreatment and abuse in their workplaces.

New York Council Member Helen Rosenthal's new law will [establish an advisory board](#) to address racial and gender-based discrimination against healthcare workers. A [separate Resolution](#) calls for implicit bias training in medical schools. Council Members, healthcare staff and advocates will hold a morning press conference on Thursday, February 11, prior to the vote.

"Our clients are suing Mount Sinai to fight back against a whole system that denigrated and discounted them because of their sex, age and race – to shine a light and to help others see they aren't alone. Hundreds of students, faculty and alumni signed letters of support because they know it's not just a few bad apples who are responsible for discrimination in health care, it's a culture that needs to change. This bill is another step in the right direction and we're proud our clients helped inspire it," said Dr. Ann Olivarius, leading workplace discrimination attorney and Senior Partner at McAllister Olivarius.

Dr. Natasha Anushri Anandaraja, one of the plaintiffs, said: "We want to change the conversation around discrimination at Mount Sinai forever, but we are also standing for women and justice beyond the boundaries of our legal claims. Right here in NYC we are changing legislation. We continue to receive emails and calls from healthcare employees who hear our case and are empowered to fight for themselves."

Dr. Holly G. Atkinson, another of the plaintiffs, said: "Institutions must be held accountable for their actions — or their lack of action. Creating a Gender Equity Advisory Board for New York City will signal to our institutions that they must begin to do the work *in earnest* of changing the climate and culture of medicine in our hospitals and academic medical centers. We can and must create safer work environments for women and minorities. Everyone will ultimately benefit, including all of the patients these institutions serve.

Dr. Stella A. Safo, another of the plaintiffs, said: "For Mount Sinai to fulfill its obligation to deliver equitable and exceptional healthcare to all New Yorkers, the Institution must acknowledge that gender and race-based discrimination cannot be tolerated. Mount Sinai's treatment of this case is its watershed moment."

Atkinson et al. v. Mount Sinai – case details

In April 2019, eight current and former employees of Mount Sinai Health System's world-renowned Arnhold Institute for Global Health (AIGH), a pre-eminent institution dedicated to improving health care for underserved populations around the world, filed a federal complaint alleging sex, age and

race discrimination against Mount Sinai and its employees Dr. Prabhjot Singh, then-Director of AIGH, and Dr. Dennis Charney, Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine, as well as two others.

[The Complaint](#) alleges that Dr. Singh, on becoming Director at age 32, deliberately marginalized and undermined female employees – especially distinguished senior doctors who had played a crucial role in establishing AIGH’s sterling reputation – trying to force them to resign.

Dr. Singh spoke of running AIGH as a start-up and seemed determined to replicate Silicon Valley’s tech-bro culture, saying he intended to hire a research team that was “ideally young, in their twenties and thirties” and abandoning established recruitment procedures in favor of hiring largely younger, male friends and contacts, despite their thin knowledge of global health.

Since the lawsuit has become public, 1,000 Mount Sinai physicians, staff, trainees, and alumni have signed letters to the Mount Sinai Board of Trustees, requesting concrete steps to investigate and address discrimination and bullying at the institution.

Singh has stepped down as a Director of AIGH but remains at Mount Sinai. The plaintiffs, meanwhile, continue to suffer the consequences of Singh’s abuse both to their careers and their emotional and physical well-being. Mount Sinai has not apologized to them or offered any redress.

They remain determined to obtain justice. They seek to improve conditions for women at Mount Sinai so it lives up to its full potential as a world-class hospital and medical school, and to stand up for other women who are discriminated against in science and medicine.

Notes for editors:

*The plaintiffs are available for interviews, as are their lawyers **Dr. Ann Olivarius, Dr. Jef McAllister and Paul Hughes.***

Audiovisual content of the plaintiffs is available.

Full details of the complaint are here: <https://mcolaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-08-06-McO-Press-Release-Mount-Sinai-Amended-Complaint.pdf>

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