

Details emerge in surgeon firing at Quincy hospital

By Doug Flanagan

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QUINCY — Statements from Quincy Valley Medical staff indicate the head of surgery was fired because he did not take part in a hospital-mandated program after concerns were expressed about his behavior.

Gaston Cornu-Labat was given a 90-day notice Oct. 29 and was told his employment at the hospital will end Jan. 27. Hospital officials have said he will not return to work during the 90-day period.

Members of the Quincy Valley Medical Center staff said they support Hospital Administrator Mehdi Merred in their statements as well.

The backing of Merred comes soon after Merred apparently withdrew his name from consideration for the chief medical officer position at Teton Valley Hospital in Driggs, Idaho. Q102 FM, a radio station in Driggs, posted Nov. 16 on its Web site that Merred interviewed for the job that day as one of four finalists. However, according to a report in the Teton Valley News on Dec. 7, Merred dropped out of the running.

Merred told the Post-Register on Dec. 7 that he didn't have any comment about why he applied for the job or withdrew from consideration.

According to a statement from Sage View Clinic doctors Mary Klingner, Charlene Brush and Rhonda Ramm, head of surgery Cornu-Labat was released because he failed to comply with an evaluation requested by the hospital after employees expressed their concerns about his recent conduct.

"We have been colleagues of Dr. Cornu and have had the opportunity to observe his behavior from the perspective of medical providers. We have all had concerns," the statement read.

"We introduced these concerns to the Quincy Valley Medical Center medical staff. The staff, having been confronted with such issues, was obligated by law, by the bylaws governing the medical staff of QVMC, and by our duties to our patients, the people of Quincy, to investigate these concerns to ensure the future welfare of our patients.

"Dr. Cornu was given the fullest benefit of due processes accorded by state law and the rules governing the medical staff. ... The medical staff afforded Dr. Cornu the benefit of the doubt from the outset of its investigation. ...

"Dr. Cornu chose not to comply with this process. We fully support the conclusion of the process which has necessitated the termination of Dr. Cornu from QVMC."

Cornu-Labat confirmed the hospital referred him to the Washington Physicians Health Program, a nonprofit corporation that helps identify health-care practitioners who have a mental or physical condition which could affect their ability to practice with reasonable skill and safety. The facility refers them for evaluation or treatment, monitors their recovery and endorses their safety.

Cornu-Labat did not have the evaluation.

"The WPHP was unable to provide any solution to this situation, and the only thing they did was impose on me their proposal and difficult the process even further," Cornu-Labat wrote in a statement to the Post-Register.

"Anticipating this outcome with this entity, I proceeded on my own to seek three psychological evaluations that proved my mental sanity. These were presented to the administration and inappropriately invalidated by them.

"This forced me to seek a fourth evaluation by a psychiatrist that further confirmed the previous results, and to report this most irregular situation to the Department of Health and to see if they consider necessary any further evaluation of my person for which I am at their disposition.

"The statements from the hospital describe the observation of concerning behavior that could affect the well-being of the patients. It would be tremendously helpful to know what exactly are the behaviors of concern

and how could these affect patient care. I have not been able to gain this knowledge so far.”

The hospital’s board of directors held a special meeting Dec. 7 at which board Chairman Don Condit said the Washington state Department of Health is investigating the matter. He read a prepared statement by the hospital board.

“First and foremost, the board would like to assure everyone that the actions of the board and those of the investigative team have been conducted in full compliance with our bylaws and Washington state laws,” Condit stated.

“To that end, our board secretary has worked extensively with (Merred), acting chief of medical staff and legal counsel to ensure that the investigation was conducted in accordance with the above laws. ...

“The board, along with QVMC, assures you that the final results will be disclosed as soon as they are known.”

At the meeting, the board voted to not allow hospital employees to produce information in response to a written or verbal request from Cornu-Labat; instead, the employees must refer the request to legal counsel.