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Hospital Settles Suit Over Woman's Strip Search

Patient Says She Was Undressed By Male Security Guards

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BOSTON -- A woman who sued a hospital after she was undressed by male security guards in the emergency department when she went there with a terrible headache has settled her lawsuit out of court, her attorneys said Tuesday.

Cassandra Sampson challenged the hospital's mandatory clothing removal policy in 2006 as discrimination on the basis of psychiatric disability.

The settlement was announced Tuesday by Sampson's lawyers at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law in Washington, D.C., but they would not release details, citing a confidentiality provision.

Sampson said she went to the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center's emergency department in 2005 for treatment of severe migraines.

After she said she was receiving psychiatric treatment and had recently had thoughts of injuring herself, she was required to have a psychiatric evaluation and the staff asked her to remove her clothing to be searched.

Sampson took off most of her clothes but told hospital staff she feared taking off her pants, her lawyers said. She agreed to a pat-down to confirm she didn't have any unsafe objects, but afterward five guards forcibly stripped her, the lawyers said.

At the time, hospital officials said the search was necessary to make sure Sampson wasn't hiding drugs or weapons. They said Tuesday that they regretted that Sampson had "a difficult experience in our emergency department."

Sampson's lawyers said the hospital has adopted new policies that permit patients to remain in their clothes unless they pose imminent risks of injuring themselves or others. Sampson said it's "nice to know" people now can feel safe going to the emergency room. "What they did that day really hurt me," she said in a statement released by her lawyers. The hospital declined to discuss changes in policy. It said it is committed to the safety of patients and staff and "the protection of the rights of all patients."

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