

Lawsuit: 2 Workers Fired For Reporting Harassment

March 14, 1998|By JODY A. BENJAMIN, Miami Bureau, The Florida Sun-Sentinel

Two former workers at Aventura Hospital and Medical Center claim they were fired after reporting others' drug use and complaining their boss sexually harassed them.

Sabrina Skiperdene, 38, and Justine Vance, 37, made their allegations in a lawsuit filed in Federal District Court in Miami.

The women, both respiratory therapists, say their supervisor regularly asked them for sex and made lewd comments about their bodies in front of co-workers. When the women complained to his supervisor, they were fired, they said.

A hospital spokesman said an internal investigation of the allegations turned up no evidence of sexual harassment. Hospital officials declined to discuss the complaint, saying they had not received a copy of the lawsuit. But they issued a written statement.

“The lawsuit appears to be based upon allegations that these women have previously made,” the statement said. “After an extensive internal investigation, these allegations were found to be groundless and we continue to believe this to be the case.

“The hospital takes any allegations of sexual harassment very seriously and does not tolerate any form of harassment.”

An attorney for the two women called the hospital's investigation a “sham.”

“Human Resources called the harasser immediately after Skiperdene made the complaint,” **attorney Stuart Address said.** “By the time she got back to her desk, he already knew. He said he was prepared to make her life hell.”

Skiperdene and Vance say they both were hired in 1995.

According to the lawsuit, the supervisor repeatedly asked both women for sex and made lewd comments about their breasts and buttocks. The women claim they asked him not to talk to them about sex, but he continued. Both were fired in May.

The lawsuit also alleges that the hospital failed to pursue complaints by Skiperdene and Vance that co-workers who had contact with patients used alcohol and illegal drugs while on the job. Hospital spokeswoman Amy Erez would not comment on that allegation.

“There's nothing we can say until we see the lawsuit,” she said.