

Former Kaiser Doctor Talks To ABC7

Claims Many Medical Mistakes

 By Debora Villalon

Nov. 11 - KGO - A doctor who once worked at Kaiser Permanente in South San Francisco claims preventable medical mistakes happened too often at that hospital. He says cost-cutting moves put patients' lives in danger, and when he tried to warn Kaiser, he was fired.

Dr. Cyrus Safai, former Kaiser doctor: "It was an uphill battle, sometimes a daily battle."

Surgical radiologist Cyrus Safai worked at Kaiser for 13 years, the final years a battle he says as budget cuts made quality care impossible.

Stephen Schear, attorney: "He was just not provided the staffing, the technology or the nurse to be able to the procedures that needed to be done and so the linkage between cost and inadequate care was clear in many of these cases."

Patients whose conditions worsened and patients who died waiting for a procedure.

Dr. Safai's lawsuit against Kaiser claims, case after case, where patients were "denied and delayed care" and suffered "gross misdiagnosis with serious harm."

He complained all the way up to the state medical board, telling them:

Dr. Cyrus Safai, former Kaiser doctor: "There was an unwritten policy of let the patient die but save the budget."

Kaiser is under scrutiny now, after acknowledging four patient deaths due to medical mistakes: overdoses or drug mix-ups, and in one instance, feeding a patient solid food against doctor's orders.

It's estimated as many as 98,000 Americans die from medical errors each year.

Dr. Lonnie Bristow, former president, American Medical Association: "Healthcare has gotten so complex, particularly during the last 30 to 40 years, that it now becomes very error-prone because of the complexity."

But Dr. Safai believes many mistakes come from cost-cutting because staff is overburdened and under-equipped.

State inspectors found many of the same deficiencies he complained about at his hospital and his colleagues launched a petition drive to get Kaiser to reinstate him.

Instead, Safai says, they ousted him to silence him about mistakes he believes continue to this day.

Dr. Cyrus Safai: "In my experience and incidents I was involved in & many of them were covered-up."

Dr. Safai's case goes to trial in January.

ABC7 contacted Kaiser about his claims and his wrongful termination lawsuit, but the health care giant had no comment.

Kaiser's still trying to formulate a statement about the rash of fatal mistakes in the South Bay other than to say they are taking full responsibility and are taking corrective action.

Take Action Into Your Own Hands

State senator Elaine Alquist says she will propose legislation in January mandating hospitals report serious medical errors within 48 hours and require the state to create a database to make that information public. Tell her what you think by sending her an e-mail through our [ABC7 Taking Action page](#).