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some extra
stuff*
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Medical examiner left in limbo after harassment case

It came like a lightening bolt, unexpected, sudden and troubling. "Medical Examiner Dismissed" blared the headline on page one of the April 7, 1994, News Journal.

Sacking Dr. Ali Z. Hameli, medical examiner and chief pathologist for 30 years, is equivalent to stealing Caesar Rodney's statue during a Wilmington police convention.

He has been president of the National Medical Examiners and Delaware Medical Society, and was on the international forensic team that identified the remains of Nazi death camp doctor Joseph Mengele. He assisted in the Philadelphia MOVE bombing inquiry, received national and international recognition and has been honored by his peers. He's single-handedly responsible for the \$2.6 million State Forensic Science Laboratory in Wilmington.

After the headline, the allegations began to surface. Two former secretaries who had worked for Hameli filed complaints — five months apart — alleging sexual harassment on the job. They said in court papers that Hameli had touched them on the arm, kissed one of them on the cheek and asked about their sexual fantasies. He supposedly offered to teach them the Persian word for

genitalia. Hameli denied all.

An investigation by the state Personnel Office supported the women's claims, and Health and Social Services Secretary Carmen, R. Nazario fired Hameli, who is 62.

Two weeks later he filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court charging Nazario and the state with failure to follow due process. He petitioned that his case be heard before an "impartial decision-maker."

Five months later the judge ruled the state indeed violated due process. He was paid \$44,000 in back wages, reinstated and hasn't been to work since. A hearing on the harassment charges was held in November 1994 before

U.S. Magistrate Mary Patricia Trostle, the impartial decision-maker Hameli had sought.

The attorney general's office had already announced it would not bring criminal charges.

Hameli said in an affidavit that he did touch one woman when she complained of being cold. He agreed she felt cold and turned up the office heat. He may have touched her on the shoulder to get her attention but never rubbed her shoulders as she alleged. And he did kiss her on the cheek after they wished each other a happy holiday during Christmas week.

There is a third woman, an assistant medical examiner who had a run-in with Hameli. He had told her to stop leaving confidential examination reports in an out basket on her office door. She replied with profanity and was formally reprimanded.

Hameli and his lawyer, Sheldon Sandler, contend that she has orchestrated this three-way vendetta. The women corroborate each other's stories. And it was the assistant medical examiner who suggested the other two women keep dairies on Hameli's allegedly offensive language. All three women eventually quit their jobs.

The two women who brought the complaints to the Personnel Office have since been paid off by the state so they won't sue Nazario or Gov. Carper.

And the verdict on sexual harassment charges from Trostle? She still has it under consideration.

Ali Hameli may well have said some of the things of which he's accused. How many men in their 60s do you know who haven't said something stupidly sexist, talked about sex or told a dirty joke in mixed company? Most women would consider the source before making a federal case out of it.

Isn't it strange how it took 30 years before anyone decided Hameli wasn't a politically correct doctor?

These women may have wanted a pound of flesh from Hameli but they got a side of beef. With his career and reputation in the toilet, it's beyond me what good a innocent verdict would do now — or for that matter a guilty one.

Ron Williams is assistant editor of the editorial pages.