

Suit: Female Physicians Assaulted, Harassed by Yale Doctor

 [usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2020-03-12/suit-female-physicians-assaulted-harassed-by-](https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2020-03-12/suit-female-physicians-assaulted-harassed-by-)

By DAVE COLLINS, Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Six women who are doctors at Yale University filed a wide-ranging sexual harassment lawsuit Thursday, accusing a male physician at the Ivy League school of repeated incidents of forced and unwanted kissing, groping and retaliation.

The doctors' lawsuit also accused officials at Yale and Yale New Haven Hospital of refusing to discipline Dr. Manuel Lopes Fontes despite their complaints.

They also alleged Yale has a history of not acting on sexual harassment complaints against male doctors.

"This lawsuit is intended to finally give a voice to those women whose stories of harrowing sexual misconduct at Yale University have been stifled for far too long, and to bring about justice against both the powerful men that have targeted them, and those at the University who have protected and supported these men," the lawsuit says.

Fontes, an anesthesiologist and a professor at Yale's School of Medicine, did not return an email message seeking comment Thursday. His lawyer, Robert Mitchell, denied all the allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment.

"Dr. Fontes has been vilified without a fair opportunity to defend himself against what has been a vindictive backroom campaign of scandalous and vicious falsehood, rumor, and innuendo," Mitchell said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press.

"Dr. Fontes will respond and the truth will shame them as well as those who have prejudged him without affording him even a hint of due process," Mitchell said.

The lawsuit, first reported by NBC News, was filed in U.S. District Court.

"Sexual harassment has no place in medicine or higher education," their lawyers Michael Willemin and Tanvir Rahman said in a statement. "And Yale University, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, is not above being held accountable for its alleged history of protecting powerful male doctors at the expense of its female employees and students."

Willemin and Rahman also said that despite knowing of the complaints against Fontes, Yale officials promoted Fontes to lead the Anesthesiology Department's diversity and inclusion efforts.

Karen Peart, a spokeswoman for Yale, said school officials took appropriate action last summer when three of the plaintiffs came forward. She said they were offered resources under Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination at schools receiving federal funding, as well as guidance on how to file a complaint with the university.

"Yale takes charges of sexual harassment seriously," Peart wrote in an emailed statement. "None of the plaintiffs chose to file a formal complaint; Yale has nonetheless been working to resolve the issues raised.

"As in all such cases, Yale is working to ensure that the processes we use to find and act on facts are fair to all involved parties," she said.

Several of the female doctors alleged Fontes grabbed them and kissed them against their will on several occasions last year, as well as repeatedly touched them without their consent, mostly during social events.

They also allege Fontes groped an intoxicated female resident at a party and made inappropriate contact with her body with his private parts.

They also claim Fontes would make inappropriate comments about their bodies and retaliate against them for standing up to his behavior, including making false claims to superiors about their job performance being poor.

The doctors also accused Dr. Roberta Hines, chair and chief of Anesthesiology at Yale, of failing to properly discipline Fontes after receiving complaints about him.

The lawsuit alleged Hines once gave Fontes "a light slap on the wrist by advising him to not drink with residents, and tried to justify his behavior by saying, 'Boys will be boys.'"

A message seeking comment was left for Hines on Thursday.

The lawsuit alleged Yale hired Fontes in 2015 after he had left both Cornell and Duke universities amid allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment.

"Dr. Fontes's sordid history of sexually harassing and acting inappropriately towards female subordinates ... is well known and documented," the lawsuit says. "Yet, Yale welcomed him with open arms, and he remains a distinguished leader within the anesthesiology department."