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Doc exiled after blowing whistle on graft

The Yomiuri Shimbun

YOKOHAMA--A doctor at Yokohama City University's medical school who blew the whistle on the inappropriate practice of students giving cash gifts to faculty members to obtain doctorates has been transferred to a department where the doctor's skills cannot be applied, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned.

According to sources at the school, the university normally does not assign doctors or other medical experts to departments unconnected with their specializations unless they request such a transfer. "I haven't heard of such a case," one source said.

The doctor informed the university's compliance committee in November 2007 that postgraduate students belonging to a research group of Hiroshi Shimada, former dean of the medical school, had been giving cash gifts to faculty and obtaining doctorates, the doctor told the Yomiuri. Shimada resigned as dean in late March.

The doctor was subsequently given an informal notice of transfer in January. "I asked the committee for protection, saying that I might be transferred because my research hadn't finished," the doctor said. "But the committee didn't do anything about my request."

The doctor was transferred to a department at a hospital in Kanagawa Prefecture on April 1.

After receiving the information, the committee questioned Shimada and others in the research group and released in March a report in which it confirmed the existence of the practice of students handing over cash gifts to faculty to obtain doctorates.

The university's in-house regulations require those concerned to protect whistle-blowers who reveal illegal or unethical practices from being victimized.

"We tried to provide protection for the whistle-blower in line with the regulations, but we can't say that we were able to protect him or her in the end," said Kimio Okada, vice president of the university and a member of the committee.

Concerning the whistle-blowing activity, 11 members of Shimada's research group, including associate professors, submitted to the chairman of the university's board of directors and the university president in February a letter of complaint demanding that the whistle-blower be punished for "distorting" practices in the medical school "with

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malicious intent."

Meanwhile, asked by the Education, Science and Technology Ministry to carry out a thorough investigation into the issue, the university set up a university degree screening committee headed by a former head of the special investigation squad at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office. The committee released an interim report on May 2 that said 16 professors and associate professors received a total of about 5.7 million yen.

"We can't protect a whistle-blower if we don't know who the person is. If we didn't transfer the person to other departments, it would be obvious to other people who has blown the whistle. It's possible for anyone to be transferred to a department or section that he or she doesn't wish to be transferred to," a spokesman for the university's secretariat said.

(May. 12, 2008)

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