

Sexism Charged by Stanford Physician

After 25 years of achieving recognition as a skilled neurosurgeon, Stanford Medical School professor Frances Conley has become an instant symbol of outrage for women struggling to make their way in the male-dominated world of medicine: She resigned her position as full professor of neurosurgery and last week published an op-ed piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, citing sexual harassment as the reason.



Frances Conley

"I'm not a crusader," claims Conley. She says she quietly submitted her resignation on 23 May in response to the proposed promotion of fellow surgeon Gerald Silverberg, who she felt was treating her in a sexist manner and with whom she had been feuding for years. But the next day, at a hearing on sexism held by the medical school's faculty senate (which she currently chairs), Conley says she realized that the type of sexism she was experiencing was more widespread than she had assumed. "I was surprised," Conley told *Science*. "I thought my problem was relatively confined." It was after the hearing, she says, that she decided to go public and focus attention on the problem. Conley says she has since received a deluge of supportive mail from women physicians in similar circumstances around the country.

Conley's own troubles began when Silverberg became acting chair of the neurosurgery department 2 years ago. "He has never been able to accept me as an equal person," she says, "because I'm a woman." Conley claims Silverberg undermines her authority with demeaning treatment, such

as calling her "honey" in front of her surgical team. "Every woman is called honey by this guy," Conley adds. "People on my team see me not as the surgeon who is in control, but as just another 'honey.'" The proposed appointment of Silverberg as permanent chairman, says Conley, would "validate" what she calls "the sexist arrogant behavior that other male neurosurgeons copy." Silverberg has refused to speak to the press.

Medical school dean David Korn says that until Conley's accusation, he had never heard Silverberg criticized as being sexist, although he knew that Silverberg and Conley did not get along. Korn says he has delayed finalizing Silverberg's appointment while he checks to make sure there is nothing in Silverberg's past that he has missed.

But if he finds nothing more serious than calling women "honey," Korn says, "that would not be a justifiable reason, all other things being favorable, to deny somebody a job." Korn hastens to add that such a decision would not mean he condoned the behavior, although he notes that it may be

unintentional. "I think it would warrant discussion, and a fairly clear message that that kind of thing [should] stop."

It's not just the demeaning language that angers women, says Denise Johnson, a professor of surgery at Stanford, but the attitude that lies behind it, which can hinder women's professional development in insidious ways. She tells of female surgical trainees who often are not allowed the same experiences as their male counterparts. "You may scrub," she says, "but the attending [surgeon] won't let you do anything, or he won't talk to you and explain what he is doing." Such situations often go unreported, Johnson says, because the women need recommendations from their supervisors and are afraid of jeopardizing their careers.

Korn says that a committee at Stanford appointed before Conley's resignation has been discussing ways to allow people to bring forth their complaints without fear of retribution. Another committee, Korn adds, is considering ways of discouraging the attitudes that lead to sexist behavior. "I think we're going to have to give attention, pretty urgently, to appropriate methods of consciousness raising," he told *Science*.

■ MARCIA BARINAGA

Mental Health Agency May Rejoin NIH

A long period of organizational exile may be about to end for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Twenty-five years after it was split off from the National Institutes of Health in order to offer more community-based mental health services, NIMH may soon return to the NIH fold—ironically to get out of the service business. The move, which is expected to be proposed this week as part of a reorganization of the Alcohol Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA)—NIMH's administrative parent—faces a mixed reception from researchers: Some believe mental health research would thrive in an environment focused on basic research, while others fear NIMH would lose stature.

The driving force behind the reorganization is ADAMHA director Frederick K. Goodwin, who has found himself managing an agency increasingly devoted to treatment programs for drug and alcohol abuse. In addition to NIMH, ADAMHA consists of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), and the Offices of Treatment Improvement and Substance Abuse Prevention. Half ADAMHA's \$2.9-billion budget is now spent on service programs. Researchers have

feared that, as the politically popular treatment programs grow, ADAMHA's research efforts would get squeezed.

Goodwin initially proposed splitting ADAMHA into two agencies—one devoted to research, the other to treatment. Then, about 2 weeks ago, the plan changed. Although NIH officials were willing to take back their lost child (NIMH), they had no particular interest in taking on NIAAA and NIDA. But new NIH director Bernadine P. Healy indicated recently that she was not averse to having the research components of all three science agencies of ADAMHA join her institute. If everything goes according to plan, Goodwin would agree to a significant demotion, moving from ADAMHA administrator—a presidential appointee like Healy—to NIMH director, subordinate to Healy.

All these plans require congressional approval. Senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Orrin G. Hatch (R-UT), chairman and ranking minority member of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, which would have to approve the reorganization, are in favor of it. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), chairman of the corresponding House committee, is not yet convinced the reshuffle is a good idea, according to a committee staffer.

■ JOSEPH PALCA