

L.I. woman axed from medical firm after revealing she had cancer

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By Andrew Keshner



Robyn Perlman, 63, worked at the Ear, Nose & Throat Associates of New York practice in Queens for 43 years and is suing the firm for giving her the boot after telling a higher-up she had cancer.

[\(Howard Simmons/New York Daily News\)](#)

A woman who worked at a medical practice for 43 years was booted after telling a higher-up there she had cancer, she claims in a lawsuit.

Robyn Perlman's Brooklyn federal lawsuit filed Wednesday argues her unfair firing from Ear, Nose & Throat Associates of New York was payback when she tried to do the right thing for the past couple years, challenging decisions she thought were unjust.

She argued her cancer diagnosis turned her into a victim of discrimination after she tried to protect other workers from being discriminated against. She was fired and shoved out the door in late March, soon after her lawyer complained to the practice about retaliation and discrimination against her.

Her firing from the Flushing, Queens office took only 90 seconds, Perlman, 63, told the Daily News.

She said she wasn't given any reason for being shown the door and given no time to pick up her stuff or say goodbye to friends, she recalled.

It was "incredibly depressing and really hard to understand, that that's the way such a positive career would just abruptly end."

Perlman, of Port Washington, L.I., said she walked out of the office shaking, got into her car and cried hysterically.

Perlman said surgery treating the cancer has been successful and she's back out on the job hunt. But she said she wants to hold her former bosses responsible for what happened to her.

Perlman's lawyer, David Gottlieb, of Wigdor LLP, said, "It is nothing short of despicable" that the company "would terminate Ms. Perlman after more than 40 years of service, only weeks after she complained that she was being discriminated against. We intend to send a message that this conduct is unacceptable for any employer, least of all for medical professionals."

In a statement, Ear, Nose & Throat Associates of New York said, "The defendants vehemently deny Ms. Perlman's baseless allegations of employment discrimination and retaliation. The defendants believe the allegations to be factually inaccurate and legally unsubstantiated. Ms. Perlman was treated fairly and, indeed, generously, during her employment. Because the defendants have engaged in no wrongdoing, they intend to vigorously defend her claims."

Perlman started at the medical practice in 1973 as a 19-year-old part-time file clerk. She was one of a handful of employees at a practice which would balloon to 240 employees. Perlman stuck around and said she played an important role in its growth — like leading the launch of an audiology department that proved to be a windfall.

Perlman said she was no slouch. Her rising pay and steady bonuses prove it, she said.

But Perlman's suit claims the practice started a long muscling out process over two years ago "for her complaints of unlawful conduct" and it only increased when the company restructured itself and fell under new management.

In December 2014, she "explicitly objected to the company's ongoing unlawful practice of falsely reporting revenues to the company's employee doctors." The revenues on surgeries and treatments were "falsely deflated" so that the pay doctors deserved went to the practice instead, the suit says.

When one of her superiors said she should "look for another job," Perlman said she got up to leave, showing she wasn't scared.

The problems didn't stop there.

The practice's board began shutting her out of meetings and discussions. They brought in people who tried to diminish Perlman's role, she said.

Perlman's salary was gutted — going to \$150,000 from \$375,000. The salary cut happened after she refused to fill out paperwork allegedly meant to "conceal the discriminatory motivation" behind a worker's termination. Perlman said the worker had been fired for her disability.

In December 2016, Perlman got a cancer diagnosis. She went to work the day after a six-hour procedure.

A few weeks later, her boss chewed her out for an insurance contribution error. He threatened to further slash her salary and talked about "performance concerns," which she called "fabricated."

The day she was fired, one of her bosses had a smirk "as though he was getting enjoyment out of unceremoniously Ms. Perlman after she had accused him of discrimination and retaliation," the suit contends.

"I think they should be held accountable for the way they treated me, not just me, but co-workers before me," Perlman said.

It was retaliation "because of my actions and because of my conditions and because of my age. They should be accountable. It's not right. It's disrespectful. It's just not right."