

# Doctor fired after blasting COVID preparations sues hospital

By Gene Johnson  
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — An emergency room doctor who was fired after he publicly criticized the coronavirus preparations at his hospital in Washington state is suing for wrongful termination.

Dr. Ming Lin worked at PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center in Bellingham for 17 years before he was fired in late March. He had been criticizing the hospital's leadership on his Facebook page and in media interviews, saying they had been slow to screen visitors for symptoms and to obtain protection equipment or take other precautions for staff.

PeaceHealth's chief operating officer, Richard DeCarlo, in April said Lin had been removed from his position for creating a "toxic work environment."

But amid the pandemic, the U.S. Labor Department has issued reminders to employers that it is illegal to retaliate against employees who report unsafe working conditions.

Lin's attorneys with the Seattle firm of Schroeter Goldmark and Bender and the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington filed the lawsuit in Whatcom County Superior Court in Bellingham. The complaint noted that neither PeaceHealth nor TeamHealth, the company that handles physician staffing at the hospital, had policies preventing his use of Facebook or speaking to reporters.

"Hopefully my actions will bring some publicity to the fact that healthcare workers for a long time have been repressed and they're not allowed to speak up for safety because they fear termination and being reprimanded," Lin said in a phone interview from a hospital on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where he frequently works weeklong rotations.

PeaceHealth did not immediately respond to an e-mail seeking comment. In an e-mailed statement, TeamHealth said Lin remains a paid contract physician. Both are named as defendants.

"TeamHealth values the hard work of



**WHISTLEBLOWER'S RESPONSE.** This photo taken on March 27, 2020 and provided by Dr. Ming Lin depicts him at his home in Bellingham, Washington. Lin, who was fired from his position as an emergency room physician at PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center in Bellingham after he publicly criticized the hospital's leadership in responding to COVID-19, sued for wrongful termination on May 28, 2020. (Ming Lin via AP)

our doctors, who are doing heroic work on the frontlines of the pandemic," the company said.

St. Joe's adopted several of the recommendations Lin had made on his Facebook page, Lin noted, including finding a different lab that could provide quicker COVID-19 test results, providing scrubs for ER nurses, and requiring face masks.

The lawsuit alleges that PeaceHealth offered Lin a chance to take a job at a hospital in Oregon or other, part-time positions at a lower pay within 50 miles of his home in Bellingham.

"While we believe your actions and comments both inside and outside of work were intended to be constructive and a catalyst for change, unfortunately it is not possible for you to return to PeaceHealth," TeamHealth official Dr. Robert Frantz wrote him, according to the complaint.

The lawsuit seeks Lin's reinstatement at St. Joe's as well as back pay, damages, and legal fees.

## Desperate Indian girl bikes 745 miles home with disabled dad

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brother-in-law, who'd left the capital region after the lockdown was imposed on March 25. Kumari, an eighth-grade student who moved from the village to Gurugram in January to take care of her dad, stayed on.

She said she was still exhausted from the trip.

"It was a difficult journey," she said. "The weather was too hot, but we had no choice. I had only one aim in my mind, and that was to reach home."

Upon their arrival, village officials placed Kumari's father in a quarantine center, a policy many state and local governments in India have implemented to try to keep returning migrants from spreading the coronavirus. They are now all quarantining at home.

India's ongoing two-month lockdown appears to have staved off an immediate spike in virus cases, buying the country time to build up reserves of medical supplies and expand intensive care unit capacity. India has confirmed at least 190,000 cases, including 5,400 deaths.

But the lockdown triggered a humanitarian crisis, with thousands of poor people heading back to distant villages on foot, carrying the elderly on their shoulders and with small children slumped over rolling suitcases. Dozens of people have died on the way, struck by

trains or trucks, from hunger or suicide.

India's expansive railway system, the country's lifeline, was closed to passenger service as part of the lockdown. Busses, planes, and taxis were also banned. In early May, the government resumed limited train travel for migrants wishing to return home.

For India's economy, mostly composed of informal sector jobs, the lockdown has been crippling. The government has been easing restrictions in recent weeks to allow more people to go back to work.

Kumari heard about the special trains, but her father, unable to walk, wouldn't have been able to reach the railway platform. So she decided they would bike.

Kumari's journey caught the attention of the Cycling Federation of India. The racing body, which sends teams to the Olympics, has offered to bring her back to New Delhi by train for a tryout in June. It also resonated in Washington, with U.S. President Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump calling it "a beautiful feat of endurance and love" on Twitter.

Kumari said that while she was happy with the recognition, she hadn't cycled her father home in pursuit of fame.

"It was a decision taken in desperation," she said.



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## YOUNG PEOPLE ARE GETTING COVID-19

In the United States:

- About 1 in 2 infected is under age 55.
- 1 in 3 is under age 45. <sup>1</sup>



< 55



< 45

+ HELP US, HELP YOU +  
**WE ARE FIGHTING FOR EVERYONE**



**DO YOUR PART STAY HOME**

PHYSICAL DISTANCE + WASH YOUR HANDS



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