

# AMR must pay abused patient, jury finds

**\$3.25 million award | The ambulance firm is found negligent after a medic molested women**

By **AIMEE GREEN**  
THE OREGONIAN

A Multnomah County jury Wednesday ordered ambulance company American Medical Response to pay \$2.25 million to a woman who was molested by a paramedic as she was rushed to the hospital.

Royshekka Herring's award will increase to \$3.25 million because the jury determined she was a vulnerable victim.

"This is a case about a predator who worked out of the back of an ambulance," said Greg Kafoury, Herring's attorney. "It's about the woman — Royshekka Herring — who stopped him and the corporation that didn't."

Herring claimed during the monthlong trial that the abuse had dramatically damaged her life.

The jury found Portland-based AMR Northwest and its parent company AMR negligent for failing to act to keep Haszard from escorting Herring to the hospital in December 2007. Three women had complained to the ambulance company or police in the two years leading up to Herring's abuse.

One woman said that Haszard appeared sexually excited as he stared when a hospital worker changed her into a gown at the hos-

pital. Two others said he had groped them — either on the breasts or under the pants.

Defense attorney James Dumas argued that the company actively investigated all the complaints, but Haszard was so convincing with his explanations that he "duped" those who oversaw him.

"They're not professional investigators," Dumas said. "They're not the FBI. They're not the Portland Police Bureau."

But Herring's attorney, Greg Kafoury, argued that AMR brushed off the complaints of the other women, telling the first woman to complain that she must have imagined things.

In the case of the second woman, an AMR manager claimed she was satisfied with his explanation that the touching was not sexual — rather a necessary part of checking her vital signs. But the woman, now 76, testified that she stood by her original story. As she was wheeled toward heart surgery, "in what could have been her last moments on Earth," Kafoury said, "all she wanted to talk about was what that man did to her."

The third woman had complained to police, and Kafoury criticized AMR for failing to interview her, or tell police about the two previous complaints.

In preparations for trial, Kafoury's office tracked 108 of the nearly 600 women Haszard had transported in the three years before he molested Herring. Eighteen of them said Haszard had done something sexually inappropriate.

"They're not apologizing one bit," Kafoury said of the ambulance company. "They're right here, chins up."

Dumas, the defense attorney, contended that Herring didn't suffer as deeply as she claimed. Dumas said rape victims or those who witness grotesque acts of violence suffer post traumatic stress disorder, but Herring does not.

"This woman was touched inappropriately twice," Dumas said. "And for that, Mr. Kafoury (Herring's attorney) is asking for \$5 million."

Kafoury, however, said Herring's psychologist had found her post-traumatic stress disorder "was off the charts."

Herring, 29, testified that she was semi-conscious and aware of the abuse, but helpless to move, speak or stop Haszard at times during the ride. He stuck his hand down her pants twice.

Since the abuse, the North Portland single mother of three said she suffers from frequent panic

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attacks, no longer attends her son's sporting events because she is afraid to leave her home and has become so withdrawn she lost her fiancé.

The jury also awarded Herring money based on the claim that she was a vulnerable person as she lay incapacitated in the back of the ambulance. The defense had argued that Herring wasn't incapacitated as Haszard touched her.

Herring has said The Oregonian may print her name even though she is a victim of sexual abuse. The newspaper does not normally do so.

After Herring reported the abuse to police and demanded Haszard's arrest, other women came forward to report how they were abused. Haszard was sentenced in August 2008 to five years in prison for inappropriately touching four female patients.

Immediately after the verdict was read, Circuit Judge Judith Matarazzo placed a gag order on

all parties, pending the outcome of the second phase of the trial, which starts today.

Wednesday's award was for Herring's pain and suffering. During phase two, jurors will be asked to award punitive damages against the ambulance company. Punitive damages would be meant to penalize the company, and 60 percent of that award would go to the state crime victims' compensation fund.

Four other women are suing the ambulance company, which has a contract with Multnomah County to provide emergency services. A judge ordered their cases tried separately. Herring's case was the first to go to trial.

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