

LOCAL NEWS

OB/GYN doctor claims hospital chain killed his West Covina practice



Dr. Carlos Beharie stands in front of his former office building at the Merced Medical Square in West Covina, Calif. on Tuesday June 26, 2018. (Photo by Raul Romero Jr, Contributing Photographer)

By **CHRISTOPHER YEE** | cyee@scng.com | San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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A former West Covina obstetrician and gynecologist is suing Citrus Valley Health Partners, accusing the hospital chain of negotiating in bad faith to buy his practice, then poaching the doctors he had employed to kill the practice.

Citrus Valley Health Partners did not offer a specific response to the lawsuit but released a statement in which it said it and its largest hospital, Queen of the Valley, has worked closely with “physician groups” to provide care to the San Gabriel Valley.

“We will vigorously defend our business practices for delivering high-quality patient care, which is our mission,” the statement reads.

Since 2002, Dr. Carlos Beharie owned and operated Citrus Obstetrics and Gynecology on Merced Avenue near Queen of the Valley Hospital. In the past three years, the practice had grown to include four other doctors, delivering between 80 and 100 babies a month on average, Beharie said.



Dr. Carlos Beharie stands next to the front door of his former office which is now used by another physician at the Merced Medical Square in West Covina, Calif. on Tuesday June 26, 2018. (Photo by Raul Romero Jr, Contributing Photographer)

According to the lawsuit, Citrus Valley Health Partners sought to purchase Beharie's practice in early 2017 but did not offer a fair price — the corporation never offered more than \$1 million despite the fact that the practice's revenues from its contracts with AltaMed and Central City Community Health Center alone totaled at least \$1.4 million annually.

By August 2017, negotiations had stopped when the two sides reached impasse over price. Then in October, three of the doctors working under Beharie announced they were leaving the practice to be employed by Citrus Valley Health Partners, according to the lawsuit.

In January, Beharie was forced to acknowledge the practice was beyond saving and notified his patients they would need to get in touch with their regular doctors elsewhere or seek other accommodations.

"I'm sure our patients were hurt when we had to close the practice," Beharie said. "It can't be easy to have to establish new relationships with doctors during an existing pregnancy."

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Inez Shaw of Rancho Cucamonga had been a patient of Beharie's since her first pregnancy in 2003. She gave birth to two others in his care and continued to see him for regular appointments until she got the call about the practice closing in January.

"I was devastated," Shaw said. "I really want to be able to see him, but I can't. I've been searching for a new doctor, but I haven't found one that I've been comfortable with."

Edward Susolik, the lead attorney representing Beharie, said Citrus Valley Health Partners used information made available in negotiations to subvert the practice.

"They took his patients, took his contracts, took his employees," Susolik said. "They simply misappropriated his practice without paying a penny for it."

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Christopher Yee is a reporter for the Pasadena Star-News and San Gabriel Valley Tribune covering cities in the west and central parts of the San Gabriel Valley. He grew up in Monterey Park and studied journalism at East Los Angeles College and UC Berkeley. You may find him at Dodger Stadium or at the Staples Center for L.A. Kings games.

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