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Rape libel pay-out



Martin Garfoot: Fought to clear name

The BBC's Richard Wells reports

"There was gasps of amazement in court"

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A father-of-two falsely accused by a female colleague of harassment and rape has been awarded £400,000 in damages.

Pharmacist Martin Garfoot, 46, from Whickham, Gateshead, won his defamation case against Lynn Walker, 33, after an eight-day trial at Newcastle High Court.

A High Court judge ruled that Ms Walker, also a pharmacist for Boots the Chemist's, could be named as the defendant.

He said her legal rights to anonymity should be lifted after a jury found in Mr Garfoot's favour.

Miss Walker, of Low Fell, Gateshead, Tyneside, now faces a bill of £500,000-plus after she was also ordered to meet the costs of both sides.

She was not in court to hear the jury's verdict.

The jury found unanimously in favour of father-of-two Mr Garfoot who maintained the incident never happened and

launched a civil action to clear his name.



Lynn Walker: Faces financial ruin

The court had previously heard Miss Walker claim that he had grabbed her from behind in the staff tea-room at the branch in North Shields, Tyneside, and forced her to perform a sex act on him, attempted sexual assault and then raped her.

She also claimed he had physically and verbally harassed her on other occasions when they worked together in the mid-1990s.

The court was told she had never reported the alleged incidents to police and spoke out only to senior management at Boots.

During her evidence she frequently broke down and sobbed only to be later branded a liar and an actress by barristers acting for Mr Garfoot.

Mr Garfoot, 46, of Whickham, Tyneside, maintained she had made up the story because of a personality clash between them.

'Out and out liar'

Following the jury's verdict, Mr Edward Garnier, QC, representing Mr Garfoot, told the court: "The only inference that can be drawn is that the jury have decided she is an out-and-out liar.

"If ever there was a case where a woman lost all credibility this is it."

Mr Garfoot sat motionless with his wife Janice behind his legal team as the amount of damages was revealed.

Justice Hooper refused an application by Miss Walker's barrister Andrew Monson to appeal against the amount

of damages above the sum of
£75,000.

Mr Monson said: "Her assets are limited and she will need time to pay up to the amount of £75,000."

'Sheer hell'

Outside of the court, Mr Garfoot said: "It has been sheer hell for myself and my family. I feel stunned.

"We were looking for my name to be cleared and the sheer size of the award that has been given does go a long way towards, in effect in my mind, showing everyone that there has been absolutely nothing in the allegations made against me."

Mrs Garfoot, when asked about her feelings towards Miss Walker, said: "I feel nothing. I am just cold towards her.

"The trial has been horrific and nobody should have to go through anything like this."

'Financial ruin'

Following the allegations in late 1996 Mr Garfoot was suspended while an internal investigation was carried out. He was reinstated after the investigation was completed.

He was then moved to another Boots The Chemist branch where he is currently working.

Miss Walker is also still employed by the company.

In a prepared statement after the verdict, Mr Monson said the trial had been a great ordeal for the defendant.

He added: "When the defendant hears the result she will be devastated, not least because she faces financial ruin. "The defendant may appeal on the size of the damages awarded but so far as is possible the defendant will

now try to get on with her life."

A spokeswoman for Boots The Chemists said: "We are reviewing the implications of the court's decision and that's all we can say at this moment."