

Surgeon battles for hospital trauma job

Lou Panos

On a wintry day five years ago, Dr. Ameen Ramzy crawled through the smoking, twisted metal of a train wreck, treating trapped victims and trying to minimize a death toll that was to reach 16.

His heroic efforts after the Amtrak accident in eastern Baltimore County made a nationally known figure of Ramzy, a 44-year-old trauma surgeon living in West Towson and then-director of Maryland's unique Emergency Medical Services system. Reports of the wreck and of Ramzy's ministering to the injured were carried on network television and front pages across the country.

Today, after 14 years with the Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland Medical System and its hospital complex in downtown Baltimore, Ramzy faces

a cloudy future. He and two colleagues, Dr. Howard Belzberg of Roland Park and Dr. Michael Dunham, were abruptly dismissed last month by the center's new director and have challenged that action in Baltimore City Circuit Court.

A one-week injunction blocking the action expired last Friday, but Judge Hilary Caplan deferred action in an apparent effort to allow the parties time to shape a settlement. When negotiations failed to produce an agreement by Monday afternoon, the three physicians were ordered out of the building immediately and locks on their office doors were changed.

Caplan has scheduled a hearing in the case for Friday.

"I can only say that the case has been continued," Ramzy said last weekend.

The firings by Dr. Kimball Maull, the director, have been attributed to differences over how much control UMMS will exer-

cise over Shock Trauma and the effect of this on the center.

Maull has been quoted as saying that the three physicians sought to undermine his control over the center. Shock Trauma sources accuse UMMS of trying to improve its balance sheet at the expense of quality medical care at the center, which has quadrupled the survival rate of admitted patients to more than 90% in 25 years. They have opposed a new policy under which Shock Trauma would accept patients who are not critically ill or injured and under which the patients would be charged more than if they were treated elsewhere in the hospital complex, meanwhile depriving Shock Trauma of beds held ready for graver emergencies. •

Maull did not return phone calls placed to request his comments.

The dismissals sent repercussions throughout the Maryland medical commu-

nity, including protests from many of the 20,000 personnel who staff the statewide emergency medical network. About half of this group are volunteers trained as first-responders, emergency medical technicians and paramedics under the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, which includes the Shock Trauma Center at UMMS.

At the same time, representatives of several hospitals belonging to the network, now operated by UMMS, have indicated dissatisfaction with UMMS control and have proposed that an independent trauma system be set up.

A key feature of the state system under UMMS is the use of State Police-piloted helicopters and more than 500 ambulances driven by firefighters and rescue unit personnel.

From its founding in 1962 and throughout the major phases of its development,

the Shock Trauma Center staff has resisted efforts by the UMMS administration to impose restrictions on the center.

The three dismissed doctors said they were given no reason for the firings and were given 72 hours to leave the state's new \$44 million emergency medicine institute named for its founder, the late Dr. R Adams Cowley. Before his death last year, Cowley repeatedly criticized university officials, its hospital and its medical school for what he considered inadequate support. Not until after he obtained his first major grant from the U.S. Department of Defense, more than 20 years ago, did he attract significant funding from state sources.

Once he proved the feasibility of a statewide emergency medical system, he accused university and hospital officials of trying to absorb it. Shortly before his retirement two years ago, he predicted that this would happen.