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Top Eye Doctor Fired as Corruption Accusations Fly

By Alexey Eremenko

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The head of the country's top eye clinic was fired in what his supporters called a takeover attempt by corrupt officials who accused the doctor of corruption to drive him out of the job.

The Health and Social Development Ministry, which sacked ophthalmologist Khristo Takhchidi, accused his Moscow-based clinic, Eye Microsurgery, of illegally charging patients 30,000 rubles ($1,000) and up for operations, Interfax said.

The clinic also owns assets such as stables, banyas and a bakery, and even sells plane tickets through affiliated companies, the ministry said in a statement.

That, along with complaints by the clinic's personnel, prompted the ministry not to renew Takhchidi's contract. He had held the job since 2001, succeeding his famed teacher, the late Stanislav Fyodorov.

Takhchidi will be replaced by Duma Deputy Alexander Chukhrayov, a professional doctor but not an eye specialist, the prominent daily Moskovsky Komsomolets reported.

Chukhrayov was unavailable for comment Thursday, and his press office had no comment on his possible nomination.

The clinic, meanwhile, has started a petition drive to keep Takhchidi on the job. Operations doubled to 350,000 a year — 60 percent of all eye operations nationwide — under his watch. He also boosted salaries 10 times and modernized the clinic, all with negligent state support, said the online petition, which had 4,700 signatures as of Thursday afternoon.

Takhchidi, who was purportedly handed his walking papers as he was leaving the operating room, slammed the corruption allegations as "lies" in an interview to Rusnovosti.ru, although he did not comment on the specific accusations.

Instead, he said his ouster was part of a two-year campaign to sack him, and promised to sue.

Takhchidi did not specify why the ministry wanted to remove him, but Moskovsky Komsomolets reported that he refused to participate in the siphoning of funds. Allegations of rampant corruption at the ministry have been widespread since Tatyana Golikova became its head in 2007.

The ministry did not comment on Takhchidi's attacks Thursday.

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