

Uzbek Surgery Scandal

Author: [IWPR Central Asia](#)

Newspaper reveals case of a doctor alleged to have done dozens of unnecessary operations to make a quick buck.

Uzbekistan's medical profession has been hit by scandal after doctors claimed that healthy patients were subjected to potentially dangerous unnecessary surgery – and charged hundreds of US dollars for the privilege.

In a rare show of the power of media, it was a local newspaper in the southwestern city of Karshi that brought the case to light, leading to a high-level investigation.

The allegations were made by a group of surgeons and former patients at the main hospital for Kashkadarya region, located in the city. They claim unnecessary surgery was performed on at least 40 patients over a four-year period. In each case, the patient was advised to undergo an operation for a non-existent stomach complaint, but the treatment consisted of the abdominal cavity being opened and then immediately sewn up again.

Patients paid around 150 dollars for each operation – a huge amount given that the average monthly wage in Uzbekistan is only 30 dollars.

Five doctors who had been unwittingly involved in the scam took the story to Advokat Press, a national weekly newspaper writing about legal matters, after their complaints were ignored by health officials.

They allege that Mamanazar Pardaev, the head of the hospital's surgical department, diverted staff from carrying out routine operations and instead turned to the moneymaking business.

"In order to get money from the patients' relatives, he prescribed an operation, and then cut open the patient's stomach and sewed it back up, saying that he had carried out a major operation. The patients' condition became even worse after this," said the doctors in an open letter to the paper.

The letter went on to cite 17 cases of unnecessary stomach surgery allegedly carried out at the hospital.

Pardaev has emphatically denied the charges.

The doctors said the reason why it took them so long to go public was that Pardaev did not use the same assistant for each operation, so it was only when they began comparing notes that a pattern emerged.

Azamat Jalilov, a doctor with the surgical department, said the group initially approached the hospital's head doctor to no effect, and their subsequent complaints to the regional health authority and the health ministry had not been acknowledged.

However, when an article was published in Advokat Press in January, the health ministry sent a commission to investigate the case. The media in Uzbekistan are generally tightly controlled, but there is

some leeway for reporting that highlights a localised issue.

After conducting checks, the commission established that Pardaev had indeed made errors in prescribing and carrying out operations. He was suspended from duties and is banned from entering the hospital, but refuses to resign his post until the commission proves all the charges against him.

In an interview with IWPR, Pardaev rejected the commission's finding and the allegations made by his colleagues. "I am innocent, and I am paying no attention to slander," he said.

The commission is now looking for further evidence of unwarranted medical interventions, and is asking many of Pardaev's patients to come back for checks.

Abdusalom Bahromov recalled that he was taken to the Karshi hospital after a fight in his village in the Chirakchi district last summer, and was told that he had a duodenal ulcer that required treatment.

"I don't know whether I needed that operation back then. There was nothing wrong with my stomach at all," he said.

Some of those who were operated on have since developed complications and have been recalled for treatment in any case, including 44-year-old Panji Baikabilov.

Jalilov told IWPR that Baikabilov was now suffering from a rib infection and may have to be sent to the capital Tashkent for further treatment.

"I didn't know I was the victim of a scam," said Baikabilov, wiping away tears. "I spent all my money on the treatment and now I'm an invalid."

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