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Pair found not guilty of embezzling in Moreno Valley county hospital case



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A jury found the former director of a Moreno Valley hospital and the hospital's former pediatrics chief not guilty Monday of embezzling \$305,720 in Riverside County funds and destroying public records, but convicted the pair of keeping false time cards.

Donna Matney, 48, of Chino, former director of the Riverside County Regional Medical Center, and Dr. Daniel Aldana, 39, of Corona, former pediatrics chief, could each get four years in state prison when they are sentenced on Sept. 21.

After deliberating for six days, the jury deadlocked 9-3 on a charge that Matney misappropriated county funds. A unanimous verdict was needed for a conviction. Aldana was found not guilty of the same charge.

"The jury's decision shows that neither defendant attempted to steal or cause harm to the hospital," said Steven Harmon, the attorney for Aldana.

"We're obviously disappointed, but the jury has spoken and we disagree with their decision," said Deputy District Attorney Michael Cabral. "We believe there was fraudulent intent."

No decision has been made on whether to retry Matney on the charge that the jury hung on, that she misappropriated county funds, Cabral said.

Aldana was already the pediatrics director when Matney hired him in December 2000 to do consulting work as a temporary county employee.

Aldana earned up to \$50,000 annually for the consulting work, which a defense attorney said involved improving operations at the hospital at a time when it was struggling financially. His full-time hospital salary at the time was \$150,000, according to county records.

The two were convicted of falsifying county records because Matney signed time cards presented by Aldana showing that Aldana was at work when he was actually attending his own wedding and on vacation in Chile and Paris.

Matney was also accused by prosecutors of paying Aldana, in his role as a consultant, for painting 10 pictures for the hospital's children's ward.

Matney's defense attorney, Virginia Blumenthal, said the paintings were not a factor in the case.

She said the misappropriation charges came down to prosecutors accusing Aldana of not doing his job, when actually hospital officials "got their money's worth."

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