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New York hospitals sued by employees who worked through breaks without pay

BY ALISON GENDAR DAILY NEWS WRITER

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A wave of class-action lawsuits hit city hospitals Thursday, charging nurses and other employees are forced to work through unpaid lunch breaks.

The eight suits against public and private institutions say more than 100,000 workers were systematically cheated out of overtime.

"These hospitals save millions of dollars doing this," said lawyer Nelson Thomas. "These are forced donations these hospitals make their people give up."

Registered nurses led the charge in the lawsuits, arguing they were required to be available around the clock and never insisted on breaks - but should have been paid.

"The Labor Department has been very clear on this point. It is illegal," Thomas said.

The suits name the city's health system, the New York Presbyterian Healthcare System, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York University Hospital Center, Mount Sinai Medical, Montefiore Medical Center and Continuum Health Partners.

The Westchester Medical Center and several hospitals on Long Island face similar allegations, Thomas said.

"We plan a vigorous defense," the city Health and Hospitals Corp. said in a statement. "Similar class-action lawsuits were brought by plaintiffs in other states."

An NYU spokeswoman said the health center was in compliance with all applicable laws. Other hospitals did not return calls or declined comment.

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