

# Gay doctor won't pay military for education

## Sexual preference hidden till ordered to active duty

By KIM CURTIS  
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — In exchange for a four-year commitment to the Air Force, Dr. John Hensala got top-flight medical training at Northwestern University and Yale, unburdened by the costs of tuition and books.

Then, seven months before the psychiatrist was to report for full-time military duty, he told his superiors that he is gay.

He was discharged and billed \$70,000 for his education.

The military has made similar demands of dozens of other gays who have been ousted. But Hensala is challenging the demand for reimbursement in what could be the first such lawsuit against the Pentagon.

The Air Force said Hensala deliberately timed his announcement to get out of his military obligation.

**BUT HENSALA**, 35, said he did not know he was gay when he signed up.

"This is largely on principle," he said in an interview in his San Francisco apartment. "I would be able to pay back the funds eventually. But an employer who fires someone just because they're gay . . . I don't think it's the right of the employer to say, 'You owe us this money.'"

In 1986, before the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, Hensala entered the Armed Forces Health Profes-

sions Scholarship Program. In exchange for tuition, Hensala served 20 weeks of active duty over four years.

He earned a medical degree at Northwestern. The Air Force agreed to defer his active-duty service during his three-year residency at Yale, and then put it off again while he took a two-year fellowship in child psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco.

Finally, in 1994, the Air Force told him that his four years of active duty would have to begin the following year.

Days later Hensala announced that he is gay.

The Air Force launched an investigation. It did not dispute that Hensala is gay, but an investigating officer reported: "There is very strong evidence that Capt. Hensala made the homosexual statement, hoping to trigger separation and avoid his active duty commitment."

Hensala, however, said his coming out happened "very gradually, very reluctantly." In 1988, he told his parents and a few close friends.

**BUT HE** said eventually he realized he could not tell his patients to live their lives with integrity if he couldn't do it.

In 1997, Hensala received an honorable discharge under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and was ordered to reimburse the government \$68,536.50 for tuition, \$1,902.31 for books, \$150 for board, \$285 for equipment rental and \$555.72 for supplies.

The Air Force has until July 17 to respond to Hensala's lawsuit.



Dr. John Hensala was asked to repay \$70,000.