

Harvard professor faulted on UFO work

By Alex Beam
GLOBE STAFF

Though Harvard Medical School officials last month declined to censure professor John E. Mack, an official letter summarizing the still-secret investigation of the controversial UFO investigator criticizes his research methods, his accounting procedures and his use of the Harvard name and insignia to promote his treatment of UFO "abductees."

The sharp tone of the letter from Dean Daniel Tosteson, citing "important questions about the quality and appropriateness of the clinical care that you have provided to your patients," contrasts markedly with a milder statement released in August. At that time, Tosteson "reaffirmed Dr. Mack's academic freedom," and said Mack was a "member in good standing" of the faculty.

Mack, a former chairman of Harvard's combined psychiatry departments, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and researcher who has spent the last five years investigating alleged instances of abductions by extraterrestrial beings. To date, he has discussed most of his findings on television talk shows and in his 1994 best-seller "Abduction," prompting severe criticism from his Harvard colleagues.

From May 1994 until June 1995, a Special Faculty Committee of the Medical School conducted more than 30 secret meetings with Mack, his patients, colleagues and rivals to prepare a lengthy report on his activities. The inquiry officially ended July 28, when Tosteson summoned Mack to his office to discuss the committee's findings.

At that meeting, Tosteson handed Mack a private letter outlining the report's criticisms of Mack's work. According to Mack, both men agreed that the letter would be sent only to Joseph Coyle, the chairman of Harvard's psychiatry department, and to Mack's superior, Robert Dewart of Cambridge Hospital. In recent days, however, the letter has leaked and found a wide audience around the Medical School.

According to the letter, the Special Faculty Committee report:

■ "Expresses the opinion that you did not make adequate use of professionally qualified consultants."

■ "Questions whether your billing procedures were clear and consistent."

■ "Calls into question the rigor with which your research was conducted . . . For example, it is unclear whether sufficient diligence was exercised in the search for physical evidence of the abduction experience."

■ Urges Mack to publish his research in peer-reviewed journals.

■ States that his Program for Extraordinary Experience Research, which features the Harvard emblem on its letterhead, is not associated with the school.

In an interview, Mack decried the "leaking of a highly confidential document to the news media." He described his July meeting with Tosteson as "collegial" and said the letter "is very one-sided," reflecting only the committee's criticisms and none of the detailed rebuttal he and his lawyer had presented.