

Rowan Atkinson wins libel pay-out

Comic actor Rowan Atkinson has accepted "substantial" libel damages over false newspaper allegations that he had been on the edge of a breakdown.

Atkinson, 49, also received a public apology from Associated Newspapers, which had made the claim in the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday newspapers. Following the case at the High Court in London, Atkinson called the allegations "ludicrous, hurtful and irresponsible".

He said he would donate his undisclosed damages to a mental health charity.

Atkinson said the stories, published in December 2003 and January 2004, had "sensationalised" mental health issues.

He said they had particularly stigmatised the condition of depression, "from which I am fortunate enough never to have suffered".

His lawyer, Martin Cruddace, told the court that the articles suggested he was suffering from severe depression that required five weeks of treatment in a clinic in the US followed by recuperation.

The articles had also suggested he was taking time off acting and his ability to continue working was seriously called into question.

It was also suggested that he was on the edge of a breakdown, that his condition was so poor that friends were lying to protect him and that friends feared for him.

Both articles gave speculative reasons for the supposed depression.

Mr Cruddace said: "All of these allegations are entirely untrue and the defendant is here today through its solicitor to withdraw them."

Mr Cruddace said Associated had agreed to publish apologies for the upset and hurt caused, pay a substantial sum in damages and Atkinson's legal costs.

Associated's solicitor, Rebecca Jackson, said it was happy to accept that the allegations were untrue and offered its sincere apologies for getting the articles wrong.

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/entertainment/3649261.stm>

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