Board Pulls Psychiatrist's Credentials

City Doctor's License Suspended For Using Unproven Treatments

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A Harrisonburg psychiatrist's medical license was indefinitely suspended Thursday by the Virginia Board of Medicine.

Dr. Carl Robert Showalter signed a consent order and waived his right to a formal hearing before the 17-member board of physicians.

A formal hearing had been scheduled for Thursday at the board's Richmond offices before the agreement was reached earlier this week.

The order was signed by Dr. Warren W. Koontz, the board's executive director. The document states that Showalter engaged in "improper and unethical conduct" with seven different patients.

In all seven cases, Showalter "represented masturbation as a legitimate form of therapeutic treatment," the document states.

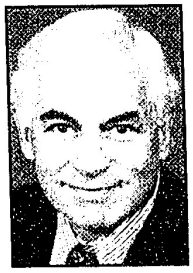
The board said in the document that "the use of masturbation therapy was and is not a recognized psychiatric treatment modality."

The order said the absence of national standards relating to the psychiatric treatment of sexual disorders does not allow a physician to expose patients to the risks of such unconventional treatment.

By signing the consent order, Showalter neither admitted nor denied the findings of fact described in the document. However, he waived his right to contest them in any subsequent proceeding before the board.

After three months from the date of the order, Showalter may petition the board for a stay of suspension, but he must first submit to a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation by a board-approved psychiatrist and a psychological evaluation by a board-approved mental health provider, the document states.

If the board president determines there is sufficient evidence that Showalter is safe to return to the practice of medicine, the suspension will be stayed under several conditions, the document states.



Dr. Carl Robert Showalter
License suspended over masturbation therapy

He can petition for the stayed suspension to be modified or terminated after one year, according to the document.

During the period of stayed suspension, Showalter would not be allowed to provide individual or group psychotherapy, the document states. Also during this time, his practice shall be limited to providing medication and conducting diagnostic assessments (taking psychological histories) for his patients and patients admitted to Rockingham Memorial Hospital and James Madison University Health Center.

"Dr. Showalter shall have a chaperone present at all times during his treatments of patients," the document said.

Showalter did not return a phone call to his office. However, he released a statement through his attorney, John S. West of the Richmond law firm Mays & Valentine.

"I am glad to have this matter with the Board of Medicine resolved," Showalter wrote. "I do not dispute the board's finding that the treatment I used was an unproven and experimental treatment modality that never gained widespread acceptance.

"However, I began using this form of treatment almost 30 years ago — based on certain case studies published in scientific literature — in an effort to provide psychiatric treatment for certain patients who struggled with very difficult sexual issues.

See DOCTOR, Page 22

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Doctor——

Continued from Page 17

"At the time, society and medical science had very different views than they do now about the treatment approaches to such issues. Because those views have changed dramatically, I stopped using this form of therapy more than 10 years ago.

"I have always sought to maintain a professional relationship with my patients and to assist them with them problems, and I extend my deepest apologies to those former patients who believe they were harmed by my treatment of them."

The seven patients were treated by Showalter at various times over a 20-year period, with the oldest case going back to 1968.

Showalter, who is in his late 50s, now practices psychiatry out of the Medical Arts Building complex at 1031 S. Main St.

In one case, the document reads, "From approximately 1968 to 1973 and 1977 to 1980, Dr. Showalter represented masturbation as a legitimate form of therapeutic treatment to Patient F, who was experiencing emotional and sexual identity issues, and on occasion, had Patient F masturbate during and as part of therapy sessions.

"Dr. Showalter focused Patient F's therapy primarily on his issues of sexuality and failed to adequately address Patient F's issues of anger and stress," the document said.

In Patient C's case, the document said the patient was suffering from extreme anxiety and a sexual dysfunction problem and "on occasion, (Showalter) masturbated him during and as part of therapy sessions."

Patients A, B and E said that Showalter did not appear to have received sexual gratification when they masturbated in his office.

On at least one occasion, Showalter allowed Patient E to smoke marijuana during the therapy session, the order says. Showalter saw that patient from October 1973 to April 1974.

As a part of the therapy, Dr. Showalter took Polaroid photographs of Patient G, who was nude, the document said. He treated that patient from 1969 to 1977.

"However, at no time did Patient G feel Dr. Showalter made any overt sexual advances toward him," the document said. "Patient G believed that Dr. Showalter's therapy, including the masturbation, did help him in addressing his psychological problems."

Patient G was the only patient out of the seven who said Dr. Showalter helped him address his psychological problems, according to the document.

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