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JMU psychiatrist's license suspended

Health director unaware of student involvement in psychiatrist's masturbation therapy sessions

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A local psychiatrist's status with the university is uncertain following the indefinite suspension of his medical license last week for prescribing masturbation therapy in seven cases from 1969 to 1988.

Dr. Carl Robert Showalter, who sometimes treats JMU students referred to him by the Counseling Center, faces suspension of his medical license for what the Virginia Board of Medicine calls "improper and unethical conduct" involving his private practice in Harrisonburg.

Showalter, JMU's psychiatrist since 1969, prescribed masturbation therapy, which the Virginia Medical Board said is "not a recognized psychiatric treatment modality." Showalter also runs a private practice in the Medical Arts building on South Main Street.

Donna Harper, University Health Center director, said she is not aware of any JMU students involved in the allegations, but Showalter's status with the university is unclear. "We're still working out what the implications and ramifications will be," she said.

Harper would not comment about who is involved in that decision.

Showalter issued a statement through John West, his attorney. "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," he said in the statement.

Showalter said he no longer uses masturbation therapy. "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," he said in the statement.

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Showalter signed a consent order Feb. 2 that waived his right to a hearing. The order stated Showalter neither admits nor denies the Medical Board's findings and indicates Showalter hasn't used the treatment in 10 years.

Showalter prescribed the treatment to seven patients who were suffering from sexual problems from 1969 to 1988, according to the consent order. These seven patients have lodged complaints.

In one case, from Feb. 1986 to May 1987, "Showalter represented masturbation as a legitimate form of treatment to Patient B," the order states.

Showalter "on occasion had [Patient B] masturbate during, and as part of, therapy sessions," the order states. The patient said he didn't think Showalter received sexual gratification from the therapy, but instead saw it as a therapy technique.

In another case, Showalter allegedly took Polaroid photos of one of his patients. The patient was allegedly naked. "At no time did Patient G feel that Dr. Showalter made any overt sexual advances toward him," the order stated. Patient G also said the therapy was helpful in addressing his psychological problems.

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>
> **consent order**
> Virginia Medical Board

Showalter can petition the Virginia Board of Medicine for a stay of suspension in three months. At that time, he must submit a psychiatric and a psychological evaluation; two state psychiatrists will determine whether Showalter is fit to return to practice medicine.

If the Board of Medicine president determines Showalter is safe to return, he could only provide medication management and conduct psychiatric evaluations with his present patients, in addition to patients at Rockingham Memorial Hospital and the JMU Health Center. He couldn't provide individual or group therapy. All therapy would require a chaperone.

After one year, Showalter can appeal to have the stayed suspension terminated or modified. This means Showalter could return to private practice if the Medical Board finds him fit to practice.