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Counselor's license is revoked

Evidence found in probe of co-worker

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A licensed professional counselor who worked with Harrisonburg psychiatrist Dr. Carl Robert Showalter had his counseling license revoked yesterday for using an experimental therapy that included "inappropriate touching of a sexual nature."

Robert E. Norvell's case involved one client whom Norvell treated for depression, sexual-identity issues and anxiety from 1988 to 1993. Norvell was ordered to surrender his license to the state Board of Professional Counselors. He will not be able to reapply for two years.

By comparison, Showalter's case involved seven victims. Showalter received an indefinite suspension from the state Board of Medicine that will allow him to return to work on a restricted basis in as little as three months. Showalter used an unapproved, experimental technique called masturbation therapy on his male clients, one of whom was 16 at the time.

The action against Norvell was negotiated prior to a formal hearing, so there was no testimony yesterday, only a summary of the "findings of fact" that were presented to the board by Assistant Attorney General Frank Pedrotty.

The findings said that on about five occasions between 1992 and 1993, Norvell "with a therapeutic purpose, videotaped [the client] while engaging in the sexual touching."

The client viewed the videotape in the office as part of the therapy, but the tape never left the office building Norvell shared with Showalter, Norvell said.

The tape was found in Showalter's office when law-enforcement authorities who were investigating complaints against Showalter conducted a search of his office.

The summary noted that Norvell told investigators "he thought he was providing an accepted therapeutic technique to address [the client's] self-concept, as the technique had been taught to him" by Showalter.

The client did not complain to the Board of Professional Counselors and told Pedrotty that Norvell had helped him during his period of psychological struggle.

After the hearing, Norvell said he regrets that "my entire career has been judged on the basis of this incident. I furthermore regret that my family will suffer as a result of this ordeal."

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