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The Roanoke Times, Friday, April 9, 1999

Man could have been sentenced to up to five years in prison

Former psychiatrist receives probation

Carl Robert Showalter of Harrisonburg must also reimburse the health care plans he fraudulently billed.

STAFF REPORT

A Virginia psychiatrist who forfeited his medical license over allegations he made male patients masturbate in his office — sometimes with his help — as part of an unproven treatment will not go to prison for health care fraud.

Instead, a federal judge in Roanoke sentenced Carl Robert Showalter of Harrisonburg to two years probation Thursday, including six months of home confinement, and ordered him to pay a $20,000 fine.

Showalter also has reimbursed $26,111 to the health care plans he fraudulently billed and agreed not to seek reinstatement of his medical license, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Showalter, 60, could have been sentenced to up to five years in prison and been fined $250,000.

Practicing in Harrisonburg, Showalter gained attention in the Roanoke Valley when he testified in a 1992 criminal trial that a man who had shot to death his estranged wife suffered from "spousal homicide syndrome."

Showalter's downfall began in the spring 1996, when a patient complained to health care officials that Showalter charged him for a nonexistent psychotherapy session.

A subsequent undercover operation, which featured a federal agent posing as a stressed-out man with marital problems, disclosed several illegal billing practices, an investigator testified in January. Specifically, Showalter billed for his psychiatric services — at a higher rate — for sessions that were actually done by a counselor with less training.

Another troubling aspect of this case came to light, however, when authorities executed a search warrant and found Polaroid pictures and videotapes in Showalter's desk drawer of teen-age boys masturbating in his office.

Seven former patients told the Board of Medicine they had been victims of Showalter's unapproved treatment.

These materials were turned over to the state Board of Medicine.

In February 1998, seven male former patients told the board that as teen-agers they had been victims of the unconventional, unapproved treatment Showalter practiced from 1969 to 1988 called "masturbation therapy," in which he sometimes assisted them.

In a letter to the board, Showalter admitted he used the treatment, saying, "At the time, society and medical science had very different views than they do now about the treatment approaches to [sexual] issues."

The board suspended his license for one year.

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