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Psychiatrist gets house arrest

He lost medical license last year

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ROANOKE — A Harrisonburg psychiatrist who lost his medical license last year after he made male patients masturbate in front of him was sentenced to six months of house arrest yesterday for overbilling insurers.

In addition to the home confinement, Dr. Carl Robert Showalter, 60, was also ordered to pay a $20,000 fine by U.S. District Judge Jackson Kiser. The judge also sentenced Showalter to two years of probation and ordered the psychiatrist to pay $249 per month to cover the cost of the probation period.

Showalter, who pleaded guilty to overbilling by mail fraud in January, is known throughout the state as an expert witness for the defense in criminal cases. He practiced psychiatry at Rockingham Memorial Hospital and James Madison University Health Center in Harrisonburg.

The investigation into Showalter's billing practices touched off a state Board of Medicine examination of his odd treatment program, which Showalter dubbed "masturbation therapy." While searching the doctor's office for billing records, a special agent with the U.S. Department of Defense found Polaroid photos and a videotape of young men masturbating.

Seven former patients told the medical board early last year that they were made to masturbate, sometimes with the doctor's assistance. The board suspended Showalter's license, and as part of a January deal with federal prosecutors he agreed to never seek reinstatement of the license.

Several of the men subjected to Showalter's therapy wrote letters to the U.S. District Court urging Judge Kiser to punish the psychiatrist severely.

Showalter had faced a fine of up to $250,000 and a prison sentence of five years. However, as part of his plea agreement, Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen Peters agreed not to object to Showalter's request for house arrest.

In court in January, Showalter admitted to overbilling insurers in 1997. According to the government's case, Showalter would see patients for a few minutes and prescribe medication, but would bill patients' insurers for therapy sessions lasting 30 to 55 minutes.

As part of his plea agreement, Showalter agreed to reimburse the insurers $26,111.

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