

Florida Times Union

Raiford prison psychiatrist quits over sex with patient

By Paul Pinkham
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A senior psychiatrist at Florida State Prison in Raiford quit Wednesday after corrections officials were asked why he was hired even though New York revoked his medical license last year for having sex with a mentally ill patient.

Emanuel John Falcone was hired for the \$188,000-a-year position in September, even after revealing his past to the person who interviewed him, prison officials said. Falcone, 52, also faces a pending recommendation, scheduled to be heard Friday, that his Florida license be revoked or suspended.

Department of Corrections Secretary Walter McNeil was unaware of any of that until the Times-Union called Tuesday with questions about why Falcone was hired, a department spokeswoman said.

“Once he learned about it, we started questioning Dr. Falcone, and he chose to resign,” said Gretl Plessinger.

She said she was unaware who else in the department knew of Falcone’s past.

A woman answering Falcone’s phone number in Fort Myers said, “I don’t think he’s going to be interested in talking to you,” before hanging up Wednesday afternoon. In his formal response to the New York Bureau of Professional Medical Conduct last year, he admitted the sexual relationship but denied ever treating the woman, who suffers from multiple personality disorder.

He was not charged with a crime.

Jennifer Druitt, executive director of the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence, said she was surprised the prison system would hire Falcone after he lost his license in New York and faces losing it in Florida. At best, she said, he exhibited serious problems with judgment.

According to the New York bureau, the woman began seeing Falcone’s girlfriend, a licensed clinical social worker, in her Manhattan office in 2003. The patient-relationship continued after the couple married and moved to Florida in 2005. Falcone’s wife would share the patient’s information with him, the New York bureau found. The woman and Falcone began communicating by phone, and he gradually took over her treatment.

In a case summary, a panel of New York physicians wrote that Falcone was “fascinated” by her alternative identities, some of which were children. Her actual age wasn’t in any of the reports.

Their sexual relationship began in 2006 when they got together in New York, the summary said. It continued with a weekend trip that year to swanky Captiva Island, near Fort Myers.

Falcone told the bureau he never considered his interactions with the woman to be treatment or therapy. But the panel rejected that argument in permanently revoking his license in September 2008 for professional misconduct, gross and repeated incompetence and negligence and failing to maintain medical records.

“He was too selfishly motivated and lost sight of his oath,” the panel said. “... We saw no remorse, no humility, no sign that he understood the great harm that he caused despite his attempt to present a speech that was supposed to convince us otherwise.”

The bureau found his actions toward the patient “predatory” and said he knew her illness left her vulnerable.

“He eventually exploited that vulnerability for his own purpose and satisfaction,” the panel wrote.

Florida’s Health Department began investigating last December, including allegations that he didn’t notify Florida authorities about the New York revocation.

The department petitioned the Board of Medicine in April for revocation or suspension of his Florida license. State law says having a license revoked by another jurisdiction is grounds for disciplinary action by the Board of Medicine.

In October, Falcone requested a hearing at the board’s Friday meeting in Orlando. The board could take any action it chooses, from a reprimand to revocation.