

Phony doctor gets 13 years

Supporters, victims make emotional pleas at sentencing

By Sue Lindsay
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

A man who promised he could cure terminal cancer patients with unconventional treatments was sentenced to 13 years in prison after a judge heard emotional pleas from both sides Monday.

Brian O'Connell, 37, was accused of hastening the deaths of two cancer patients and causing a heart attack that nearly killed a 17-year-old girl in therapies he administered while holding himself out as a naturopath.



O'Connell
was accused of duping his patients with fake credentials.

O'Connell was hauled away in handcuffs after a six-hour sentencing hearing in Jefferson County District Court. The courtroom was packed with his supporters and

victims who wanted him behind bars.

O'Connell told Judge Margie Enquist that he simply wanted to help people — not for money or prestige.

"I never did anything out of malice," he said. "I am painfully sorry and very remorseful, but I have accepted responsibility for what I have done."

He acknowledged lying about his background but said he has learned from his mistakes.

Enquist, however, told him she didn't believe it.

"People came in the most desperate of situations, and you took advantage of them," she said. "What price would people pay for the promise of a cure? The seriousness of this case comes not from the number of victims but from the vulnerabilities you exploited for your own gain."

Two of the three victims' families were satisfied with the outcome.

"We're happy. He got what he deserved," said Laura Flanagan, whose 19-year-old, terminally ill son, Sean, died in 2003, soon after receiving a blood treatment from O'Connell.

"He has no credentials. He's not

said would cause his liver cancer to come out through the skin. Instead, he developed large open sores that wouldn't stop bleeding.

Although Gallegos was losing his battle with cancer, "the poison in his body from O'Connell's treatment hastened his death," said his widow, Janet Mansfield. "Rory was robbed of dignity in death, robbed of the chance to say his last goodbyes. O'Connell filled Rory's head with false hope and false promises."

A 17-year-old girl went into cardiac arrest and nearly died just after receiving a photoluminescence treatment at O'Connell's office.

But her mother remains among his most steadfast supporters.

"It's a very, very good procedure," Catherine Bresina said. "It does no harm. It cleanses. What he was doing was wonderful."

A dozen other patients told the

judge that O'Connell helped them with a variety of ailments.

Phil Broncucia Jr. said he first thought O'Connell was a quack but went ahead with treatments because his doctors said they couldn't treat his inner-ear disorder. O'Connell cured him, he said.

Many patients said they didn't care about O'Connell's bogus credentials. "I'm more interested in outcomes than credentials," former patient Greg Archer said.

The prosecutor said O'Connell duped his patients with walls filled with phony credentials, including one that claimed he was "Physician of the Year."

But defense attorney Rick Jaffe said many patients came to O'Connell because conventional medicine failed them.

"They want results and don't care about credentials," he said.

Monday's sentence stems from O'Connell's guilty plea to charges of criminally negligent homicide, practicing medicine without a license, theft, assault and perjury.

Some patients thought O'Connell was a physician. He said he was a doctor of naturopathy, basing his assertions on a degree from a correspondence school.

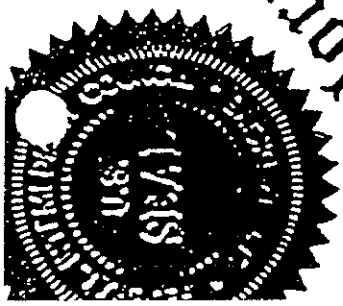
The Flanagans said they went to O'Connell after their son's physicians said there was nothing more they could do.

O'Connell told them "he could save Sean and that no Irish kid was going to die on his watch," said David Flanagan, Sean's father.

But Flanagan died two weeks after getting "photoluminescence" treatments in which a small amount of his blood was removed, exposed to light and reinjected along with hydrogen peroxide.

Another patient, Rory Gallegos, 45, developed a severe blood infection after receiving corrosive "Black Salve" treatments that O'Connell

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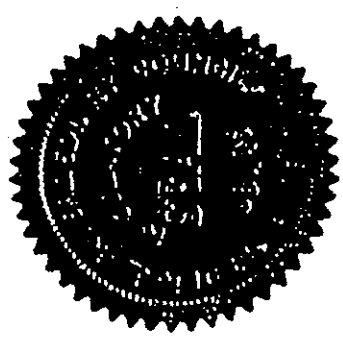
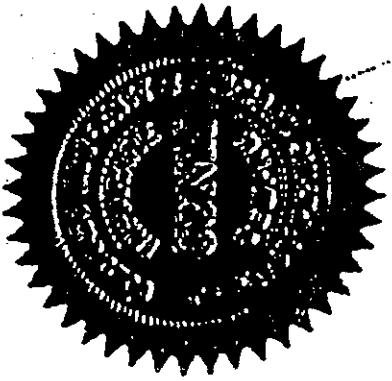
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