

## Trial begins for psychiatrist accused of sexual misconduct

December 02, 2009 | By Nick Madigan | [nick.madigan@baltsun.com](mailto:nick.madigan@baltsun.com)

A once-prominent psychiatrist and pain specialist who enjoyed a national reputation and a thriving practice in northwest Baltimore County was in court again Tuesday, facing another in a string of female patients who over the years have accused him of sexually abusing them.

Nelson H. Hendler, 65, whose license to practice medicine was revoked by the Maryland Board of Physicians in February 2006 after it concluded that he committed sexual misconduct with patients and dispensed drugs without a permit, settled earlier civil suits from some of the women. But he is defending a case brought against him in Baltimore County Circuit Court by a Pennsylvania woman who became a patient in April 2004.

E. Dale Adkins, her attorney, said in court Tuesday that Hendler followed the same script with almost every one of the women, who were often in highly vulnerable states. He would convince them that he was the only person in the world who could help them - not their husbands, not their children - and, once he had their confidence, would take advantage of them sexually, Adkins said.

"Most of these folks were dependent on pain medication," Adkins said, arguing that such drugs were a crucial tool in Hendler's arsenal. "He described himself as Robin Hood. He was delivering medications to patients, and he did it on occasion in exchange for sexual favors."

Out of the presence of the jury, which was chosen Tuesday but was asked to leave the courtroom while the two sides haggled over procedural motions, Adkins told Judge Lawrence R. Daniels that when police officers raided Hendler's Mensana Clinic on Greenspring Valley Road in Stevenson on Jan. 19, 2006, they found it messy and dimly lit. They seized 5,800 pills, which Adkins said the doctor was arbitrarily dispensing to some of the women regardless of whether the pills had been prescribed to them.

"My client will testify that she went to his office to get some and that he locked the door and sought sexual favors," Adkins said. He said there was a loaded, .22-caliber pistol in an unlocked drawer in Hendler's office, and said that one of his patients who was feeling suicidal reported later that she saw it and contemplated using it.

In February 2007, Hendler entered an Alford plea to a count of possession with intent to distribute drugs. Under the plea, Hendler did not admit guilt but acknowledged that prosecutors had sufficient evidence to convict him. He was sentenced to probation

before judgment, which staved off a conviction, and was ordered to serve 18 months of supervised probation and 150 hours of community service.

On Tuesday, the judge agreed to a defense motion to impose a gag order on lawyers for both sides during the trial, meaning that they may not discuss it with reporters. Daniels also said the plaintiff's attorney may not mention to the jury in his opening statements why Hendler is not practicing medicine now, and may only bring it up to impeach the doctor's testimony if and when he takes the stand.

Daniels said he would rule today on whether to admit the testimony of the five other women who have previously sued Hendler or accused him of sexual misconduct.

Thomas Morrow, an attorney for Hendler, objected to the possibility that the other women might be allowed to testify.

"How could my client possibly get a fair trial when he essentially has to defend against six complainants in one?" he asked the judge. "It creates an unfair environment."