

Bethpage pediatrician Rakesh Punn pleads guilty to sexual exploitation of a child

Originally published: April 24, 2014 3:53 PM

Updated: April 24, 2014 11:16 PM

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Bethpage doctor Rakesh Punn is brought into Nassau County Court in Mineola in this file photo from Friday, July 15, 2011 in Mineola. (Credit: Howard Schnapp)

As part of a plea deal, Rakesh Punn, 56, also agreed to reimburse that victim and five other young female patients, who were also sexually abused, for any restitution to be determined later by a judge. Punn, whose federal trial had been scheduled to start Monday, faces a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30 years in prison, according to federal prosecutors Allen Bode and Amy Larson.

In a statement read to U.S. District Court Judge Joanna Seybert in Central Islip, Punn said that, "On or about Sept. 6, 2007 . . . I knowingly and intentionally used a minor . . . to engage in sexually explicit conduct." The victim "was 11 years old when I took the photograph that . . . depicts . . . [her] engaged in sexually explicit conduct."

Punn has been held without bail in the Nassau County jail since July 2010 on charges that he drugged and sexually abused female patients as young as 11 years old, and videotaped his actions.

At times, he committed the acts while the patients' parents waited outside, officials have said. The "procedures and consultations had not been conducted for any medically accepted

purpose, but rather had been conducted solely for the sexual gratification of the defendant," Bode said in an indictment.

One of Punn's attorneys, Steve Zissou, of Bayside, said his client "accepts responsibility and plans to move on with his life."

Eastern District U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch said in a statement, "We trust doctors -- especially pediatricians -- to care for our children. He took advantage of children who came to him for medical help."

According to court papers, the case started when Punn's daughter, Sippy, and son, Jesse, turned their father in to Nassau prosecutors and detectives in 2010. Sippy said that in 2008 she had used her father's computer to do her homework, when her own was not working, and discovered a folder with several explicit photos of a young girl, the papers say. Later, she shared it with her brother, who recognized their father as the abuser and took it to prosecutors. The son and daughter were adults at the time, the papers say.

Jesse Punn said in a telephone call after his father's sentencing that he and his sister had no comment. Shams Tarek, spokesman for the Nassau district attorney's office said Rakesh Punn had pleaded guilty last year to grand larceny, welfare fraud and a scheme to defraud in state court in connection with a separate insurance fraud case.