

# Doctor who sexually assaulted patients at El Cajon clinic sentenced

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EL CAJON, Calif. - A doctor who sexually assaulted female patients and took explicit photographs of them with his cellphone at an El Cajon clinic for low-income patients was sentenced Friday to one year of house arrest and five years probation.

Dr. Jeffrey Joel Abrams, 68, must also register for life as a sex offender and was barred from ever practicing medicine again.

Abrams pleaded guilty in July to eight counts of sexual penetration of an unconscious person, three counts of sexual battery and one count of possession of child pornography involving pictures of an 8-year-old girl.

Judge Laura Halgren suspended a 25-year, eight-month prison sentence, so long as Abrams successfully completes probation. Abrams suffers from kidney cancer and other ailments, contributing to prosecutors' decision to agree to the plea deal.

Abrams was ordered to stay away from all victims for 10 years.

Jessica Pride, who represents 10 of the victims, said it took great courage for them to come forward. She said the victims are pleased with Abrams' sentence, as it goes beyond him just losing his job.

"He is forever now listed as a sex offender," the attorney told reporters outside court. "He is being publicly shamed now by all of you, through your media. He spent a great deal of time building his reputation which is now tainted and ruined as a result of this. He will live the rest of his life with reduced liberties. His freedom has been greatly reduced."

The sexual misconduct took place at Volunteers in Medicine, a low-income clinic in the 1400 block of Madison Avenue, said Deputy District Attorney Kerry Conway.

The charges stemmed from incidents involving 12 victims, including one minor, between June 2010 and June 2014.

The prosecutor said Abrams conducted "unnecessary and inappropriate" vaginal exams on patients. He told the women he wanted to take photographs for teaching purposes, but no photos were found in the patients' medical files, the prosecutor said.

A patient alerted authorities after Abrams touched her private area and took photos of her during a visit in January 2014.

He was ultimately charged with using his cellphone to take thousands of photos of his female patients while they were undressed in an exam room.

"These individuals have already been victimized once and made it clear they preferred not endure the additional trauma of testifying during a jury trial," Conway said. "This plea agreement ensures they won't have to re-live the crime in court and keeps the defendant away from any potential future victims."

Attorney Steve Gnau, who represents the little girl who was victimized, said, "It has been incredibly important for this family that there's no information about this child so that she could be identified. This anonymity was so important for this child that for all of the documentation in my office, she's referred to by a fictitious name. I'm the only person in the

entire organization who knows who this person is."

Jessica Pride is suing Abrams on behalf of 13 clients. She told reporters, "My clients are pleased that justice was served today. To have to go through a traumatic experience and then have to re-live it on a public setting like this, in court and in front of media -- the victims were terrified of doing that. They have forgiven him and they felt this was an adequate sentence."

Conway said of the victims, "They're satisfied and we are satisfied, knowing they are and the community is protected ... He's not going to be a doctor any long and will never be able to re-victimize."

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