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Misconduct costs massage therapist his license

by Peter Sur
Stephens Media

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A Big Island massage therapist accused of touching clients inappropriately has been fined \$10,000 and stripped of his license.

The Board of Massage Therapy, under the state Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, fined John L. Worcester, who practiced a medically questionable technique called "craniosacral treatment."

The following information, some of it graphic, comes from the findings of fact against Worcester, released Monday.

Between February and April 2000, a woman went to Worcester for treatment of back injuries suffered in an auto accident. Worcester's treatment consisted of what is known as craniosacral therapy, or CST.

According to the Web site of the Upledger Institute, where Worcester was trained, CST involves a practitioner using a light touch over a fully clothed patient to monitor a "rhythm" within the bones of the skull and remove blockages.

Worcester's treatment went far beyond that, according to state Hearings Officer Craig Uyehara.

The patient had about 20 sessions with Worcester, during which she was directed to remove all clothing. Halfway through the treatments, Worcester began touching the woman's breasts, inner thighs, pelvic region and buttocks.

Uyehara's report goes on, saying how in later sessions Worcester cupped the patient's breast and pinched her nipples, all under the guise of reducing back and neck pain. The patient confronted Worcester in her final session but relented when told it was a legitimate procedure.

Because of the patient's financial situation, a friend paid Worcester for the first one or two sessions. After that, Worcester offered to treat the woman at \$50 for two sessions rather than his normal rate of \$50 per session.

In an Aug. 2, 2002, incident involving another woman, Uyehara said that Worcester placed his hand on the woman's sternum, breast and pubic bone, and inserted his fingers into her vagina. His justification was that it was "somato-release work." He gave the woman a hug and a kiss on the mouth before she left.

Worcester had been licensed as a massage therapist since 1992. It expired in June 2006.

Last November, the DCCA filed a formal complaint against Worcester, who tried unsuccessfully to have the case dismissed on jurisdictional grounds. Uyehara denied the request and convened a hearing June 19.

In the hearing, Worcester appeared by telephone, apparently representing himself.

Uyehara recommended that the Massage Board find Worcester violated several provisions of the law, including "professional misconduct, gross carelessness, or manifest incapacity in the practice of massage"; "participating in or using the establishment for any lascivious conduct, lewdness, or any sexual act"; and "conduct or practice contrary to recognized standards of ethics for the licensed profession or vocation."

The board agreed with Uyehara's recommendations and on Oct. 5 ordered Worcester to pay \$10,000 within 60 days. His license was also revoked.

In 1999, the University of British Columbia sponsored a study of the scientific evidence on craniosacral therapy and found none.

Specifically, the study "did not find valid scientific evidence that craniosacral therapy provides a benefit to patients" and "there is insufficient scientific evidence to recommend craniosacral therapy to patients, practitioners or third party payers for any clinical condition."

Dear Editor:

In response to your recent article referencing CranioSacral Therapy, we would like to provide you and your readers with a better understanding of this highly regarded technique.

CranioSacral Therapy (CST) is used by licensed healthcare professionals ranging from massage therapists to physicians to treat a variety of disorders. During CST treatments, patients remain fully clothed while therapists use a non-invasive and very respectful manual technique to assess and influence structures of the central nervous system.

In 2002, when the events surrounding Mr. Worcester and his clients were made known to us, The Upledger Institute revoked Mr. Worcester's Certification as a CranioSacral Therapist.

CST was developed by Dr. John E. Upledger, an osteopathic physician. From 1975 to 1983 Dr. Upledger served as a professor of biomechanics at Michigan State University, leading a research team that performed and published clinical research that formed the basis for CranioSacral Therapy. The American Medical Association recognizes CST as a manual therapy technique covered under their reporting code 97140.

Sincerely,
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