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Texas PS's Offer Dangerous String "Implants" ... Drug Abusers

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Drug-abusing surgeon 'revoked'

Records show doctor botched string of cosmetic operations

By LEIGH HOPPER

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A drug-addicted surgeon specializing in penis enlargements and an anesthesiology resident who drove off the Galveston Seawall while giving himself narcotics intravenously are among several Houston-area doctors in trouble with the state.

The Texas State Board of Medical Examiners, in its most recent round of disciplinary actions, revoked the license of surgeon B.R. Ringer Jr., 49, for "failure to practice medicine in an acceptable manner." Medical board records detail repeated instances of drug abuse and a long list of botched operations resulting in serious infections.

Ringer also violated board rules by failing to report malpractice lawsuits filed against him -- 12 between 1991 and 1993 alone, the board said. Suits were filed by former patients who claimed problems such as misaligned breast implants and a disfigured penis.

"He is finally out (of practice). He's revoked, he's gone," said Jill Wiggins, spokeswoman for the medical board.

The board suspended the postgraduate resident permit of Dr. Casey Green, who worked at University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, after a July 6 car accident in which he crossed multiple lanes of traffic, drove over the Seawall and crashed on the rocks below.

Board records show emergency workers found Green half-ejected from his car with an intravenous line dangling from his arm. "Multiple hospital-grade narcotics and IV administration equipment were found in his car," the board said.

Green underwent emergency surgery and spent nine days in the hospital. The board said Green will be eligible to win back his resident permit after he completes an inpatient program for drug addiction and provides "sufficient evidence" that he is "physically, mentally and otherwise competent to safely practice medicine." He is on leave from UTMB.

The board meets on a regular basis to consider complaints about

doctors and monitor those with problems. Other doctors recently disciplined include:

- Dr. Michael Glyn Brown, 45, owner of the Hand Center in The Woodlands. Brown, who was sentenced in 2002 to 10 years' supervised probation in the beating of his pregnant wife, had his license temporarily suspended in November after he tested positive for cocaine.

In its most recent action, the board fined Brown \$25,000 and put him on probation for 10 years, granting him permission to practice again under strict rules, including drug testing every two weeks, psychiatric treatment and monthly inspections of his office and patient records.

"It's a really airtight order. He must comply with all of the provisions," Wiggins said. "If he fails to do so, any one of them, he's automatically revoked."

Brown's attorney, Jack Zimmerman, said reinstating the doctor's license was "the correct decision. The evidence when you take it as a whole indicated Dr. Brown is clearly not a danger to any patients."

- Dr. Gerald W. Johnson, 62, the Houston cosmetic surgeon who did Anna Nicole Smith's breast implants. The board placed Johnson on probation for five years for performing breast enlargements with a plastic string material long used for hernia repair and sutures. The "polypropylene string implants" -- considered an "of-label" use of medical material -- minimized scarring and was popular with women who wanted extra-large breasts.

Records show that Johnson, who has an office at 4265 San Felipe and claims on his Web site that he's performed more than 20,000 operations, has come to the board's attention in the past.

In 1998, his license was restricted after the board found he did not adequately follow up with a liposuction patient who experienced serious blood loss. In the late '80s, he came to the board's attention for removing "too much fat" in single liposuction procedures on four patients.

Zimmerman, who also represents Johnson, described his client as an "innovative and creative plastic surgeon" who occasionally is the victim of professional jealousy.

He said Johnson pioneered liposuction in Houston and helped set standards for amounts that can be safely removed in a single operation. Zimmerman said the doctor and a breast implant company were looking into polypropylene string as an alternative to silicone breast implants, which have been blamed for health problems.

"If they thought he was a danger to anybody they would not keep him in practicing status," Zimmerman said. "His patients did not complain about (the string implants) to the board. This came from some other

plastic surgeon."

- Dr. Danny Ray Johnson, 45, a Houston family practitioner who had an office at 7048 Bissonnet. Johnson's license was revoked for numerous violations including prescribing Viagra and hair-growth drugs to patients over the Internet. The board said Johnson talked to patients over the phone, but did not see them in person before prescribing the drugs. He also prescribed a narcotic nasal spray for his wife even though "he did not have a doctor-patient relationship with his wife, and does not maintain medical records for her," the board said.

- Dr. Robert Michael Leath, a family practitioner with an office at 1801 North Loop West, Suite 30. The board suspended the doctor's license for "excessive use of drugs, narcotics, chemicals or another substance." Late last year, the board was alerted to Leath's prescription practices by a Kmart pharmacist. Leath prescribed appetite suppressants, sedatives and painkillers for himself and his ex-wife. In 1999, the board restricted his license for similar problems.

Efforts to reach Ringer, Green, Danny Ray Johnson and Leath were unsuccessful