

Substantial Settlement: Children's Hospital_Predatory Psychiatrist_Sexual Assault

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"Fallon was in the psychiatric unit at Children's because her mother was dying of brain cancer and Fallon, then 13, had just tried to kill herself."

The Boston Herald reports: "A young patient who was sexually assaulted by a predatory psychiatrist has reached a "substantial" settlement with him and other doctors who she says let her be victimized when she was a vulnerable, suicidal teen."

The case, like so many others that do not reach public notice, underscores one of the unacknowledged dirty secrets of psychiatric institutions: patients, especially young females, are at risk of being sexually molested by staff.

Maria Fallon, now 20, says supervisors at Boston Children's Hospital knew Dr. Param Shukla already had been accused of assaulting a young girl in 1999 when they assigned him to her case in April 2000. Fallon was in the psychiatric unit at Children's because her mother was dying of brain cancer and Fallon, then 13, had just tried to kill herself.

Typical of how institutions shield sexual predators, the Herald reports that even though the hospital moved the psychiatrist to a research job in 1999 "while they investigated a 12-year-old girl's complaint that he had fondled her, [sic] the charges were never filed in that case, and after Shukla underwent a psychiatric assessment, he was allowed to see female patients again."

Shukla, a married 38-year-old dad at the time, lost his medical license in 2000, and was sentenced to probation in 2004 for indecent assault and battery on a child for fondling Fallon during the five days she was on suicide watch.

This is not an isolated case. A long-established culture at psychiatric institutions shields professional staff who prey on vulnerable patients.

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THE BOSTON HERALD

Children's docs settle abuse suit: Shrink fondled girl, 13

By Jessica Fargen

Boston Herald Health & Medical Reporter

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A young patient who was sexually assaulted by a predatory psychiatrist has reached a "substantial" settlement with him and other doctors who she says let her be victimized when she was a vulnerable, suicidal teen.

Maria Fallon, now 20, says supervisors at Children's Hospital knew Dr. Param Shukla already had been accused of assaulting a young girl when they assigned him to her case in April 2000.

"He took advantage of the fact that I was not in a good spot myself to know proper conduct," said Fallon, of Milton. When he began fondling her, she recalled, "I thought this is my doctor . . . I was scared and

really embarrassed."

Fallon was in the psychiatric unit at Children's because her mother was dying of brain cancer and Fallon, then 13, had just tried to kill herself.

"It was unfair. I feel like anyone in a psych (unit) is vulnerable," she said. "I was really angry. I felt like I had been thrown into something I could have avoided when I didn't need it in my life . . . He should have been watched closer and I should have been more protected by the hospital."

In 1999, Children's moved Shukla to a research job while they investigated a 12-year-old girl's complaint that he had fondled her. But charges were never filed in that case, and after Shukla underwent a psychiatric assessment, he was allowed to see female patients again.

Shukla, who lost his medical license in 2000, was sentenced to probation in 2004 for indecent assault and battery on a child for fondling Fallon during the five days she was on suicide watch. A married 38-year-old dad at the time, Shukla was also accused of sending Fallon sexually charged e-mails and begging to be her boyfriend.

Fallon's civil suit was due to go to trial yesterday, but her lawyer, William Thompson of Lubin and Meyer, said they settled the civil suit Thursday night against Shukla, a resident at the time, and his supervisors, Dr. William Beardslee and Dr. Stuart J. Goldman. Thompson said the settlement was for a "substantial" amount of money, but the terms and amount are confidential. Attorneys for the three doctors did not return calls seeking comment. Shukla, who is now living in his native India, could not be reached.

Children's spokeswoman Bess Andrews, speaking for Beardslee and Goldman, said: "No amount of due diligence or monitoring can prevent the intentional type of behavior in which Shukla is alleged to have engaged." There was no admission of negligence in the settlement on the part of Goldman and Beardslee, who still work at the hospital, Andrews said.

Fallon said she is relieved she won't have to testify. But she said she won't see male doctors anymore, and suffers panic and anxiety attacks.

"It's just been like a setback on my life," said Fallon, now a college sophomore. "It's good to put it behind me and start to finally move on. It's been in the back of my mind for seven years."

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