

Treatment center told to get straight

State regulators investigate clients' complaints of abuse

By Diane Loupe
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A Marietta drug-treatment facility — accused of denying the adolescents in its care water and medical attention and physically restraining them — has not followed its own rules for investigating such complaints, state health regulators have charged.

The state Department of Human Resources Office of Regulatory Services has given Straight Inc. until March 16 to come up with a plan for fixing "serious deficiencies," said Martin Rotter, director of the state office.

Because of the controversial facility's poor documentation and follow-up to complaints from clients and their parents, investigators could not clear Straight of the allegations, but it also could not prove them, according to a Feb. 28 letter.

The facility did not have qualified counselors and did not follow state guidelines for such things as dispensing drugs and detailing psychiatric and medical needs, a weeks-long investigation found.

Center administrator denies clients' allegations

C. Suzanne Hardman-Broder, administrator of Straight Inc., denied that clients were abused or mistreated and claimed that the state regulators did not discuss such allegations with her.

Straight Inc., which has been operating in Marietta for almost 11 years, is part of a Florida-based chain of adolescent drug-treatment facilities that has come under fire in other states. Officials in California, Virginia and Florida have investigated complaints of abuse, in some instances closing facilities.

Clients at the Marietta facility alleged they were:

- ▶ Called a "slut," "tramp" and a "hell-raiser" in front of a group.
- ▶ Denied access to water, medical care and sleep.
- ▶ Physically restrained and not permitted to leave even if they were an adult.

Other problems detailed by the regulators included:

- ▶ The facility couldn't prove their psychiatrist evaluated a client who swallowed a bottle of cough medicine and some whiskey, and slashed his arm.
- ▶ One counselor had only a general equivalency diploma; three others had only bachelor's degrees with majors in psychology.